

The Manifest IV



The Manifest #4

Key to Abbreviations

ABC	= Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.	R&HD	= Randall & Hopkirk (Deceased)/ My Partner the Ghost
BR	= Beyond Reality	RGB	= Real Ghostbusters
CHAM	= The Champions	ROS	= Robin of Sherwood
DS	= Due South	Sa&St	= Sapphire and Steel
E2	= Earth 2	SC	= Shadow Chasers
F13	= Friday The 13th — The Series	SixS	= The Sixth Sense
FK	= Forever Knight	SL	= Sliders
GB	= Ghostbusters (films)	SLA	= Shades of LA
HI	= Highlander	sQ	= seaQuest DSV
IJ	= Indiana Jones	STh	= Seeing Things
K:NS	= Kolchak: The Night Stalker	SWL	= She-Wolf of London/Love and Curses
KF:TLC	= Kung Fu: The Legend Continues	TPN	= The Tomorrow People (new)
L&C	= Lois and Clark (The New Adventures of Superman)	TPO	= The Tomorrow People (original)
MAC	= MacGyver	VR5	= VR5
NK	= Nick Knight (Rick Springfield version)	VS	= Vanishing Son
OF	= The Omega Factor	XF	= The X-Files
ORIG	= Original Paranormal		
QL	= Quantum Leap		

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"Call for Papers" and "In the Beginning" by Deb Walsh; edited by Kathryn A. Sullivan and Joyce Riffle. Medical Consultant and Proofreader: Joyce Riffle. Art by: Barbara J. Caldwell: 64, 80, 262; Laura Miles: 6, 21, 26; Sharon Palmer: 60, 112, 122, 164; Deb Walsh: 32, 47, 130, 160, 213, 251. Cover collage designed by Deb Walsh.

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Welcome to issue #4 of **The Manifest**. Sorry for the delays — 1995 has been a year of strangeness. I was right on track with the zine as of February 20, 1995 — I spent the entire long weekend doing reforms and edits, and things were humming along nicely. Until February 21, when I could no longer access my hard drive (the hardware guys said, "Gee, Deb, we've never heard a hard drive make *that* kind of noise before!"). The computer was gone, and with it, all my work. One or two stories had been copied from the hard drive to disk, but most remained forever inaccessible on that dead drive. Sigh. Back to square one. I bought a new computer, and decided that if I tried to force both **Sound of the Flute** and **The Manifest #4** out in time for MediaWest*Con, I'd have two poor zines, instead of one good one and one late one.

So **The Manifest #4** was postponed, supposedly to premiere at MountainMediaCon in August. Well, then came the neighbors who had been making my life miserable for the past 9 months. "What, you can't get by on four hours of sleep a night? What do you expect us to do? Be quiet? Be real!" Trust me — there's no affection in the nickname "Neighbors from Hell." So, to finally get some much-needed rest, I moved in July to a new apartment. It's gotten better in recent weeks, making working on the zine a lot easier (it's tough to edit when you can't quite focus ...). In any case, trying to pack up all of my books, videos, zines, stuff, and two cats took up most of the first half of the summer, and unpacking took up a good month. Then, my printer of two years decided it no longer wanted to give up the pages it printed ... imagine trying to print a zine this size out one page at a time. I ended up buying a new printer, a laser this time, and discovered that it doesn't really take 12 hours to print out a zine! So I thank everyone — the contributors and readers alike — for their patience. It's been a weird road this time around.

This will be the last issue of **The Manifest** for around a year and a half, possibly longer. I need to take some time off to focus on writing projects, and I'm hoping to move out of state next summer, to get closer to my family. So the future of **The Manifest #5**, like the truth and *The X-Files*, is, "Out there." I plan to elaborate on some of the themes I've started in the "Call for Papers" this issue, and of course, we'll finally get to the mythical conference at Georgetown Institute. But all of those stories take time to write, and editing several zines simultaneously just isn't giving me the time I need right now. So, I'll be taking a "writing sabbatical." I'll post information on the net, as well as send out flyers, once I have a better idea of what's happening with the next issue (and where I'll be). This is probably the last "open submission" issue of **The Manifest** — next issue will be the infamous conference, with stories written primarily by me and a couple of others working with me, and I'm not sure if I'll do an issue beyond that. In the meantime, there's this issue — and I'm very pleased with what I have to offer this time around.

"Voices" arrived in my E-Mail box from Cody Nelson, and proved to be a wonderful surprise. Cody's a wonderful writer, and has other stories which will be appearing in zines. This version of the story is slightly different from what was posted on alt.tv.x-files.creative, but I have to admit that Cody's such a strong writer, it was an easy edit.

"Possession is 9/10 of the Law" by A. 'Nea Dodson appeared in **CrossSignals #6**, the second *She-Wolf of London* crossover in that zine. The zine is now sadly out of print, but Nea promises me she's working on some new stuff.

"Cult Buy Me Love" by Liz Vogel and "Fashion Risk" by Sheila Paulson were the two **RGB** pieces I'd accepted for **Trap Open! #2** before cancelling it due to lack of submissions. Imagine my surprise when "Bustin' Shadows" by Pat Dunn and Diana Smith showed up only a few weeks after I cancelled the zine. I tend to like keeping single-fandom zines focussed on those single fandoms, so "Bustin' Shadows" was a natural for **The Manifest**. We have a nice assortment of good **RGB** in this issue.

"Hummer" is a terrific story by Rory Cottrell, whose work I first discovered in *War of the Worlds* fandom. Printing this story is a pleasure.

I met Maddog in *Robin of Sherwood* fandom years ago, but this is the first time I've had the opportunity to publish her prose. "A Walk by the Lake" and "Forget Not" are two great examples of Maddog's talent, and her love for *Forever Knight*.

Mary Robertson returns to **The Manifest** with a lovely little tale of original "ghost" fiction.

"The Bridge" by Tracy Taylor was written prior to the run of the second season of *The X-Files*. A "what-if?" piece, this story does not follow canon as established in the second season. It reminds me of the classic ghost love story, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, one of my favorite films. "Virtual Reality in a Cro-Magnon World" by L.C. Wells was withdrawn by the author so she could give it the attention it deserves.

"Return to Serenity" finishes (uh-huh) the story started in **The Manifest #1** in "Playing with Fire." Working with Kathy Sullivan is always a pleasure, especially when she's writing something as good as this. And I suspect we'll see more in the continuing adventures of MacGyver and Laura.

And it would not be a **Manifest** without Pat Ritter and one of her Floyd stories. I suspect that the day Pat runs out of Floyd stories, we'll see the last **Manifest** — they've become a tradition and a mainstay, and I'm always happy to see a new tale.

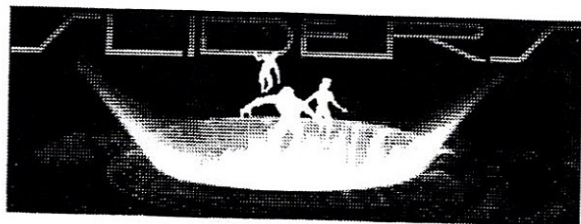
Also included in this issue are more "Call for Papers" vignettes, which seem to have taken on a life of their own. I swear I'm simply channelling these things — I've now got ideas for stories I never considered, born while I was writing this issue's crop of "Call for Papers." So expect at least some of them in the next issue of **The Manifest** — Sapphire and Steel have made it clear they intend to meddle with several genres, and the Sliders have already announced at least two stories they want me to write for them.

Big thanks to the artists who made this issue beautiful — Barbara Caldwell, Laura Miles, Sharon Palmer and Marty Siegrist. Ghu, sometimes these guys make my hand ache!

As always, thanks are due to my editors and proofreaders, without whom this zine would not be in your hands right now. Kathy Sullivan and Joyce Riffle always go above and beyond, and they are crucial to the level of quality I always aim for in this zine. They'll be enjoying my writing sabbatical more than I will, I suspect, since it means they won't have to keep proofreading massive amounts of fiction. Then again, I'm planning to send my stuff to them for editing, so maybe they'd both better take a vacation now ... I have lots of plans for the next year or so of writing! Until the next issue, whenever it will be, enjoy. Happy reading!

Deb 11/12/95

Call for Papers



The vortex spat them out like bad cheese, and Quinn Mallory and his companions fell sprawling to the dewy grass of the common. Quickly, Quinn regained his feet, whipping out the remote control that governed – barely – their travels through the vortex into and out of the alternate Earths. The experiment had started out as an exciting journey, but Quinn, like his friends, was beginning to weary of the never-ending parade of not-quite-homes they reached each time they stepped out of the mouth of the vortex.

"How long are we here for?" Wade Williams asked, dusting herself off and coming over to where Quinn studied the readout on the control.

"Forty-eight hours," Quinn replied, glancing up to take in their surroundings. They were in the park, as they frequently were when they landed, and all of the features looked like home. No alien national flags flapped on the flagpoles; no strange music played from the bandstand; no weird uniforms were in evidence. In fact, the few people in the park looked promisingly normal, and for a moment, his heart lurched with the hope that they had at last made it home. It was not the first time he'd thought so, and so he schooled his racing pulse back to normal in preparation for disappointment. Sometimes, he wondered if they'd ever get home. He knew the others did, too, although none of them voiced that concern. To do so ... well, putting it into words would make it all too real. In the meantime, they always had that hope.

"Good! Long enough for a shower, a decent meal, and maybe a good night's sleep," Rembrandt "Crying Man" Brown announced with satisfaction. "And in the best of all possible worlds," he added with a warning glare toward their fourth, Professor Maximillian Arturo, "some *proper* music!"

Arturo returned the glare with interest, but as Rembrandt turned away, softened his expression to one of wary concern. Quinn glanced over and shook his head; best not to push Rembrandt too far on the subject, it was still too raw a wound.

In the last alternate Earth they'd visited, classical music had been the popular entertainment, and when Rembrandt had tried to earn them some money for food by singing in the park, he'd been arrested for "noise pollution." It had been a world in which music had never diversified into rock 'n' roll, soul music, disco, or any of the other varied forms of popular music as they'd known it. They'd never even heard of gospel music in that world. Rembrandt had been sentenced to not only life imprisonment, but removal of his vocal chords so he couldn't make the "foul noise" again.

It had been a near miss, but Quinn and Wade had managed to get him out of jail, while Arturo had distracted the Sound Police, in time to catch the next vortex window. Ever since, the two men had been arguing over the relative merits of rock 'n' roll (specifically the soulful variety) and classical music.

"Can't work up a decent tear for Beethoven," Rembrandt complained.

"His works have frequently moved me to tears, Mr. Brown. Uplifting, food for the soul ... the music of the angels," Arturo countered loftily.

"Elevator music," spat the singer. "Background music on the Weather Channel."

"Will you two knock it off?" demanded Wade. "Look, let's see where we are, get something to eat – I'm starving. How much money do we have?" she asked Quinn.

He checked his pockets, and pulled out a fist full of bills. "We're okay, so long as they take this kind of money in this world." He held out the bills, normal-enough looking with the right Presidents on their faces, and familiar-looking markings. In fact, identical to the currency of the world from which they'd originally come.

"Great. I could really go for some pizza," Wade cried, snatching several bills from Quinn's hand. She ignored his "Hey!" and raced off in search of a pizza parlor.

"Pizza it is, Mr. Brown, Mr. Mallory," Arturo intoned, shrugging as he turned to follow after Wade.

"Yeah, so long as she doesn't do any of that pineapple stuff she likes," Rembrandt pointed out.

"Ah. In that case, gentlemen, I suggest we hurry," the Professor reminded, and with only a briefly shared look, the three men darted off after Wade.

As they disappeared into the street beyond the park, two figures shimmered into being where they'd stood. A tall blonde woman, sheathed in a silken blue dress of Oriental design, and a shorter man, his blond hair streaked with gray to match his suit, looked after the quartet with undisguised concern.

"They are playing havoc with the timestreams," Steel pointed out ominously.

"They have no way home, until the remote control guides them into the proper channel of the vortex," Sapphire reminded.

"Perhaps we should assist. Divert them from the vortex."

"Kill them, you mean," she countered, turning angry eyes toward him. "To repair the control device would be simple enough. *Silver* could do it."

"*Silver's* a technician. That's what he's there for. I'm a specialist."

"You don't like to get your hands dirty with gadgets," she guessed, smiling. "Or is it you don't know how?"

"I don't know why you're interested in them, anyway," Steel complained. "As a threat to Time, yes. But for this conference you're so taken with?"

"Like everyone else, they have something to offer. They haven't reached it yet, but one of the worlds they'll encounter will be important. A world in which telepathy and psychic powers are not only illegal, possession of them is punishable by death. That experience will be invaluable for the members of the conference."

"Why?"

"Because it could happen on Earth Prime. Because they will learn, on that alternate Earth, what triggered the bigotry toward the psychic. With that knowledge, they can help the others avoid that, so that the next age of Man can proceed properly."

"I've never understood your fascination for the people of this planet. You involve yourself too much," Steel said tersely.

"They have great potential."

"Potential for what? Self-destruction? Creating time breaks at every turn? We end up on this planet — on the Prime — more than any other."

"Humans are a people who value their own past, who value their history."

"Humans are obsessed with things. Things which can act as triggers," Steel reminded balefully.

"As a race, they lack sensitivity to those triggers. Their evolution into a race of psi-sensitives would change that."

"Ah. Now that's a reason I can understand and support."

"Really?" Sapphire answered skeptically. "I had no idea it would be so easy to convince you."

He glared at her momentarily, then nodded toward the edge of the park, where the foursome returned laden with cardboard pizza boxes and paper bags. They were still arguing amongst themselves, Rembrandt gesticulating wildly toward Arturo, Quinn shaking his head, and Wade scrambling to get inside the pizza boxes. "I don't imagine we want to meet them just yet."

"No. Not yet. But soon," she agreed, and turned away, winking out of sight.

"Too soon for me," Steel grumbled, and followed suit.

Sliders

(Fox)

Quinn Mallory Jerry O'Connell
 Wade Wells Sabrina Lloyd
 Rembrandt Lee "Crying Man" Brown Cleavant Derricks
 Professor Maximillian P. Arturo John Rhys-Davies

Premise:

"What if you could find brand new worlds right here on Earth, where anything is possible? Same planet, different dimension. I've found the gateway!"

College student Quinn Mallory was fascinated by the concept of travelling between dimensions. When he accidentally created a dimensional gateway in his basement, he stepped through into another version of Earth. He convinced his friends, Wade Williams and Professor Arturo Maximillian to try out the gateway, but when he turned up the power, the vortex opening spread wide enough to engulf singer Rembrandt "Crying Man" Brown en route to Candlestick Park to sing the national anthem at a baseball game. The quartet were transported to another Earth, and they found themselves in danger of being killed there. Accelerating the timer on the remote control to force them out of the alternate Earth, they found themselves in yet another alternative Earth, and now they continue travelling from Earth to Earth in search of their home.

Episode list (in order by airdate):

Pilot (2 hours)	Prince of Wails	The Weaker Sex
Fever	The Summer Of Love	The King is Back
Last Days	Eggheads	The Luck Of The Draw

Note: *Sliders* is scheduled to return to Fox's schedule in January of 1996.



The **X** Files

Voices

by Cody Nelson

Mulder woke with a start, the threads of his dream already dissipating. The muted babble of the television told him that he'd fallen asleep on the couch again. He pulled the blanket up around his chest and curled up on his side, hoping to convince his weary body that he hadn't really woken up, but he knew it was already too late.

Sighing, he threw off the cover and sat up, rubbing his eyes. Try the bed? Read a while? Watch TV? There was an old Western playing on the flickering screen. "Don't worry, guys, the cavalry'll save you," he whispered. The VCR clock glowed 3:47.

Mulder stood, tugged at his twisted T-shirt, and padded into the kitchen. One cup of coffee, then he'd go to bed.

If you ever slept past 4:00 a.m., do you think you'd still believe in little green men?

If more people saw the world at 4:00 in the morning, maybe they'd be more willing to believe, he answered the thought.

He switched on the fire under the kettle and stared at the bottom of his favorite mug.

There'll be little green men growing in there soon.

I'll wash it tomorrow, he promised, spooning instant into the mug. Thank God for decaf, or I'd never sleep at all. He leaned back against the counter and yawned. How was it possible to be so tired and yet so unable to sleep? I wonder what Scully's doing right now ...

Sleeping, like a normal person.

Of course, she was asleep. Scully didn't suffer from insomnia. Her world was the same at 4:00 a.m. as it was in broad daylight. Lucky Scully. He pictured her asleep, her face peaceful, red-gold hair spilling across the pillow.

Don't start getting hot for Scully, his early morning voice interrupted. She thinks you're one step away from being a psycho.

I'm not getting hot for her, he protested. Scully's my friend. She stands by me, even though she doesn't believe. And someday, we're going to find the case that will prove to her that something is out there.

And then what? Even if Scully believes, it still won't bring Samantha back.

I know. But if I give up, if I stop believing — that won't bring her back either.

For once, the voice was silent.

The kettle was boiling. I'll just have one cup of coffee, he thought, pouring hot water into his mug. Then I'll go to bed.

F **BI Headquarters
Washington, D.C.**

FBI Agent Fox Mulder, specialist in cases involving unexplained phenomena, was not off to a good start this morning. After a particularly bad bout of insomnia, he was seriously wondering just how long he was going to be able to keep his eyes open. His partner and resident skeptic, Dana Scully, placed a fresh cup of coffee — his third already — before him with an indulgent smile.

"Didn't sleep well last night?" she asked.

Stifling a huge yawn, Mulder replied, "What makes you say that?"

"Besides that it's generally a pretty safe assumption, even when you're not falling asleep in your coffee?"

"I'm fine." He was not up to his usual level of banter.

She turned serious. "You should see a doctor about your insomnia." Her medical training couldn't help asserting itself from time to time.

"And what's your diagnosis, Dr. Scully?"

She smiled. "Too many scary stories before bedtime."

Mulder leaned back in his chair and sipped his coffee. Just another day at the X-Files Project. He picked a manila envelope off his desk and tossed it to Scully.

"What's this?"

"Our next case."

Scully pulled a couple of newspaper clippings from the envelope and skimmed several of the stories. "Three medical students at the same school commit suicide within two months." She looked over the clippings at Mulder, eyebrow raised. "It's a disturbing story. But where's the X-File?"

"None of the students was depressed or suicidal until about two weeks before the suicide. Suddenly, their behavior became erratic, even delusional. No one has been able to come up with an explanation for it."

"Drugs?" Scully suggested. "Medical students live pretty high-stress lives. And they have access to a lot of pharmaceuticals."

"No evidence of drugs in the autopsies. Friends insisted none of the students was a drug user. And no drug paraphernalia was found in the dead students' living quarters."

Scully returned her attention to the newspaper articles for a few minutes. "One student slit her wrists. One shot himself. The latest one jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge. No drug overdoses. That's a little unusual in itself, for medical students. Drugs would be the most easily accessible method. But that still doesn't make it an X-File."

Mulder leaned forward in his chair. He was on the hunt. Scully knew that look.

"A student — normal, well-adjusted, reasonably happy — suddenly starts behaving oddly. Skips classes, becomes paranoid, talks about hearing voices. Friends try to help, but the student's behavior gets worse. A few weeks later, the student kills himself. Or herself. Almost immediately, another student begins to behave erratically. And the same pattern is repeated, three times so far. Always one student at a time behaving strangely. As soon as one dies, another

takes his place. Doesn't that strike you as a little strange?"

"Well, yes, strange, but ..."

There was a glint in Mulder's eye. He had, as usual, saved the kicker for last. "Do you know who was the last person to see each of the suicides alive?"

She held the clippings in her hand. The answer was in them, of course, but why deprive Mulder of the pleasure? "I'm sure you're going to tell me."

"The next student to die."



CSF California Medical School San Francisco, California

The University of California at San Francisco Medical School was a sprawling campus of modern buildings in the heart of San Francisco, several blocks from the Haight-Ashbury district and Golden Gate Park. Scully pulled her lightweight coat more tightly around herself and complained, "I thought this was supposed to be sunny California."

Mulder shrugged. The weather had caught him off-guard too. The chilly ocean breeze cut through his suit coat. "We're not here to get a suntan."

"Just what are we looking for? Alien body snatchers? Demonic possession?"

Mulder grinned. Scully never passed up a chance to needle him about his willingness to believe in anything from extraterrestrials to psychic projection to werewolves and vampires. "You're the Catholic, Scully. You up on your exorcism techniques?"

"They didn't cover that in catechism."

They'd looked at the autopsy reports on the three dead students. All of the reports were consistent with the method of suicide and showed no other unusual findings. Now they were headed for the dean's office to see what they could find out about the students while they were alive. The puzzled dean had given them the directions to his office somewhat reluctantly that morning. His voice had shown the strain of having to deal with a string of suicides at his school.

The strain was also evident in his face as he invited them to sit in his elegant leather and oak office. The dean was a thin, ascetic-looking doctor in his late fifties, wearing a white lab coat and a slightly haggard look.

"It's tragic, of course, but I still can't see what possible interest the FBI could have in our situation. From what I've been told by the police, there's no question that all the deaths were suicides."

Scully glanced at Mulder. She left it up to him to explain what they were doing there, if he could. "We don't doubt that the deaths were suicides. We just think there might have been some sort of outside influence causing them."

"What do you mean?" The man was outwardly calm, but his knuckles were white from pressing his hands so firmly to the desk.

"I understand the students showed some pretty erratic behavior in the weeks before their deaths. There must have been a reason for it."

"What are you suggesting? Drugs? The autopsies showed no sign of drugs."

Now Scully spoke. "Some of the new designer drugs are pretty hard to detect. They are effective in extremely low dosages and their chemical compositions are constantly being varied. They've been known to have some intense and unexpected side effects."

The dean's mouth drew into a hard line. "The police investigated that possibility, and found no evidence of it."

Mulder glanced at Scully before answering, a slight lifting of the eyebrow indicating his surprise at her comments. She hadn't mentioned any of this before in their discussions of the case. "If it wasn't drugs, what was it?"

The dean frowned at them, chin jutted out. "Medical school puts students under a lot of stress. We do our best to help them through it, of course, but ... it's difficult to predict which ones will handle the stress and which ones ... All three of the students were close friends. Sometimes, unfortunately, these things have a cascade effect. There's no need to make it even more unpleasant than it already is."

Mulder spoke softly. "We're not here to make things unpleasant. But if there is something out there hurting your students, don't you want to know what it is?"

W

hat was that about designer drugs, Scully?" They were once again walking across the campus, coats pulled tightly around themselves. The meeting with the dean had produced little, but they did have the address and phone number of the roommate of the last suicide.

"A possibility," she replied shortly.

"You saw the autopsy reports. There was no evidence of drugs."

"There was no evidence of pod people, either. Did you want to tell that poor dean that his students were being driven to suicide by UFOs? He was on the verge of a breakdown himself." There was an edge to her voice that went beyond their usual banter.

"Scully." He stopped her with a hand on her elbow. "What's up?"

She glared at him for a moment, then her expression softened and she sighed. "I went to medical school myself, Mulder." She looked away. "I remember what it was like. I remember friends of mine who wondered if they were going to make it through. I don't want to tell these people that their students are being destroyed by unseen forces. I want to tell them that everything is going to be all right."

"It will be all right. If we can figure out what's happening, and find a way to stop it."

"That's a pretty big 'If'."

"Not for us. I thought we were invincible."

He finally forced a reluctant smile out of her. It hadn't occurred to him how this case might affect her. Should he worry about it? But she'd already shaken off her mood and gone back to being her usual unflappable self.

C

hris Beldock lived in a small, sunny Victorian flat in a pleasant residential neighborhood west of the campus. The furniture was obviously second-hand,

but the apartment was neat and comfortable. Chris himself, however, was disheveled and edgy. He stalked around the room nervously, occasionally throwing himself down on the couch, only to jump up and begin pacing again moments later. He was pale and drawn, with dark circles under his eyes.

"I understand you were the last person to see Jerry Fisher alive. Can you tell us what happened?" Mulder spoke gently.

"He was really upset about Val." Chris stopped at the fireplace mantel, picked up a small piece of pottery and stared at it for a moment as if he had never seen it before, then put it down and continued his patrol of the room. "He wasn't sleeping. He'd be up all hours of the night. He kept saying it was all his fault."

"He blamed himself for Val Kochanski's death?" Scully asked.

"What? Oh ..." He seemed to have forgotten that Scully was in the room. "Well, they were friends, I guess. I mean, yeah, they were friends ... Jerry couldn't get over it. Then he started saying really crazy stuff." He dropped into a chair, stood up, hurried into the kitchen, then immediately came back again.

"What sort of crazy stuff did Jerry say?" Mulder asked.

"That he was ... That voices were telling him things." Chris laughed suddenly, a humorless laugh, tinged with hysteria. "Voices. Anybody who hears voices must be crazy, right?"

"I don't know, Chris, I think everybody hears voices sometimes."

Scully gave Mulder a curious sidelong look; a look that plainly said that she never heard voices. But neither of the men was paying any attention to her — Mulder was concentrating on Chris Beldock, and Chris was staring out the window.

"I was working the night he died. I have — had — a part time job at a coffeehouse down the street. He called me about half an hour before I got off work and told me that he was going up to Fort Point. I asked him why he was going there at night. He said he just wanted to see what the bridge looked like in the dark." He paused and

sighed. Mulder and Scully waited, reluctant to distract him with questions.

"I thought he might be going to do something stupid. So as soon as I got off work, I went after him. I didn't know how I was going to find him. But I went to the bridge right away. I just had a feeling ...

"He was standing right in the middle of the bridge, looking out over the railing. When he saw me coming he started to climb over. I started running toward him." He turned to face the two FBI agents, the pain fresh in his face. "I didn't really believe he'd do it. Maybe I shouldn't have run at him, I don't know. I tried to grab him, but he was already falling by the time I reached him. I just had his arm for a second, and then he was gone." He stared at his hand, the fingers through which his friend had slipped to his death. Then, abruptly, he resumed his pacing. "Now I know how it feels. How he felt. How can you live with something like this?"

"Chris, I know it's been hard for you. It's terrible to lose a friend this way. But you mustn't give up. Jerry wouldn't want you to." Scully spoke earnestly; Chris appeared not to hear her.

The two agents glanced at each other. Mulder inclined his head toward the door; Scully nodded.

"Chris, thank you for seeing us. We're very sorry for your loss." Scully turned to the door, Mulder following her. But as Mulder stepped across the threshold, Chris Beldock came over and took his arm urgently.

"You know what I mean," he whispered. "There are voices."

"Yes. I know." Mulder touched the student's arm. "Look, Chris, if you need someone to talk to, I'll be in town for a couple more days." He dug a business card and a pen out of his pocket and wrote the name and phone number of the hotel where he and Scully were staying. "I don't sleep much at night, so don't worry about calling late. Any time you want to talk. About anything. I mean it."

Chris took the card. His expression had gone blank, and he turned and walked back into the room.



hat was that about, Mulder?"

"The kid was on the edge. It's been over two weeks since the last suicide. You know what that means."

Scully frowned at him. "Mulder, I haven't seen anything yet that leads me to believe that this is anything more than a couple of stressed-out kids committing suicide. And yes," she hurried to forestall his next question, "I saw how he was acting. He's just had three friends die, one right in front of him. Anybody'd be a little erratic after that."

Mulder shrugged. "I thought he looked like he could use a friend. Anything wrong with that?"

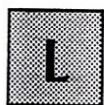
"No." She sighed. "No, there's nothing wrong with that. But I'm sure he has other friends. And counselors at school. It's not our job to provide emotional support for this boy."

"It is if what killed the other students is now trying to kill him."

She pressed her lips together and walked a few moments in silence before answering him. "You know, Mulder, not every case has a supernatural explanation. Some of them are just ordinary, everyday tragedies."

"And some of them aren't."

She started to speak, then resolutely closed her mouth. "It's late. We're still on Washington time. Let's talk about it in the morning."



**Lombard Hotel
San Francisco, California**

The jangling phone woke Mulder from a restless, dream-harried sleep. He reached for the receiver, rubbing his eyes and searching for the clock. Waking in a strange hotel room was always disorienting.

"Hello?"

"Hello. Mr. Mulder." The voice was flat and so quiet he could barely hear it.

"Chris? Is that you?" Mulder pushed himself up onto his elbow, struggling awake.

"You said to call anytime."

"Yeah. It's okay, Chris. What's up?" He finally found the bedside clock. Two-thirty a.m. Washington time would be ... also the middle of the night.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Mulder."

"It's okay, you're not bothering me. And it's Mulder. Just Mulder."

"I ... can't sleep. It won't let me sleep. I'm so tired ..." The exhaustion was evident in his voice.

"I know how you feel. I have trouble sleeping too." Mulder sat up, forcing back a yawn.

"No, it's not ... It doesn't matter. I shouldn't have called you. I just can't do this anymore. It has to stop."

"Chris, it's okay. Talk to me." Suddenly he was fully awake.

"No, it doesn't matter. It's too late. Jerry was right. I don't know what else to do."

"Chris, listen to me. Are you at home?" Mulder threw the blanket aside and fumbled for the light switch. "Don't do anything, I'm coming over."

"No, don't come. It doesn't matter," he repeated. "It's too late. I'm sorry I bothered you." Chris Beldock hung up.

Mulder phoned for a taxi while pulling on his clothes. Wake Scully? No, he decided. He could handle this. Let her sleep.



He sat pressed against the door of the taxi, fists clenched and nerves tight, all the way to Chris Beldock's apartment. Fortunately, the traffic was light and the cab driver was quite willing to comply when Mulder asked him to hurry. Should he have called the police? he wondered. But what would he tell them? A distraught student was planning to commit suicide because he'd been possessed by ... what? Mulder didn't know himself what he suspected. Aliens? Psychic projection? Demons? Nothing that left any physical traces, at least after death. Perhaps Scully was right, and it was some sort of exotic drug that dissipated so quickly that an autopsy couldn't detect it. If he could keep Chris Beldock alive long enough, maybe they'd be able to figure out what it was ...

The taxi pulled up before Chris Beldock's Victorian building. Mulder threw a couple of bills at the driver, then ran up the steps. He rang the bell repeatedly, and knocked on the door, but there was no answer. Maybe Chris hadn't been calling from home. Or maybe it was already too late.

He stepped back, then kicked the door. It held the first time, but the second kick slammed it open. Mulder ran into the apartment. The lights were on, but the front room was empty.

"Chris?" he called. The kitchen was also empty. Both bedrooms were dark. The bathroom door was closed. Mulder thought he heard running water inside.

He opened the bathroom door, then recoiled in horror from what he saw. Chris Beldock sat in the floor beside the bathtub, dressed only in his underwear, arms dangling into the tub, blood streaming from gaping gashes in his wrists, reddening the water. He stared up at Mulder glassily.

Mulder checked his first impulse to rush to the boy's side, instead dashing back into the front room to pick up the phone and dial 911. In a few terse sentences he reported the suicide attempt, then he rushed to aid the student.

"Chris, hold on ..." He knelt beside the boy, pulling his arms out of the water. Blood spilled onto his clothes as he tried to stop the flow with towels. Chris was barely conscious; his half-closed eyes saw nothing.

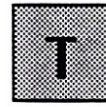
"Come on, come on, don't die ..." Mulder pleaded. How long did it take to bleed to death? It couldn't have been more than twenty minutes since Chris's call. The towels were already red and dripping. Mulder forced back his own horror and panic, wrapping the towels tighter, but the flow seemed unstoppable. His hands were sticky with blood.

"Chris, don't do this, help is on the way, just hang on a little longer ..." But the light was already going out of the boy's eyes.

"No! Damn it, no!"

Something hit Mulder like an electric shock; shot through his entire body with a force that left him dizzy and gasping. Chris's head lolled forward

onto his chest, and his body went limp. Mulder fell back against the toilet, horror already fading into anger and grief. Too late. Too late. Chris Beldock was dead.



Two paramedics sat on either side of the dead student. They'd dragged the body out into the front room to give themselves more room to work, leaving a smear of blood along the floor, and their equipment lay scattered around them. Two police officers also stood by, notepads in hand, talking quietly with Scully, who was attempting to explain just what a couple of Washington, D.C. FBI agents were doing in the San Francisco apartment of a medical student who had just committed suicide. She kept glancing over at Mulder, who stood with his back pressed against the wall, arms wrapped tightly around his chest, staring blankly at the floor. His shirt was still blotched with Chris Beldock's blood. He'd barely said a word since she'd gotten there; in fact, it had been the police who'd woken her from her sound sleep at the hotel and asked her to come with them to Chris Beldock's flat.

One of the paramedics shook his head, then sat back on his heels and looked up at the police. "He's gone."

Mulder turned his head away, eyes shut tight. Scully moved to stand next to him, allowing her arm to touch his. "Mulder? You all right?"

"I have a headache." Abruptly, he pushed himself away from the wall. "Can you finish up here, Scully? I need to get some air." Without waiting for an answer, he walked out of the flat.

Mulder walked into the night, nerves stretched tight and temples throbbing. He'd seen his share of dead bodies before, even watched a few die, but this had been different. He'd never seen anyone die by his own hand; he'd never had anyone call him for help and then die in his arms. He'd known that afternoon that the boy was in danger, why hadn't he stayed closer? Why hadn't he thought of something better to say on the phone? Why hadn't he gotten there sooner?

Because you're a failure ...

I did my best, he insisted.

But it wasn't good enough, was it?

There was nothing more I could have done.

That's always your excuse, isn't it? "I couldn't do anything. I couldn't help. I couldn't move ..." the voice mocked silkily. And the people who count on you get let down. This isn't the first time, is it?

Suddenly, he was twelve years old again, and in his parents' home in Chilmark, Massachusetts. The front door had flown open to a blinding white light. His little sister Samantha was screaming. Something stood in the doorway, obscured by the light. "Fox!" she screamed. "Fox, help me!" And he wanted to help her, more than anything he'd ever wanted to do in his life he wanted to help his sister, to hold on to her, to protect her from that column of light, but he couldn't do anything, he couldn't move, he crouched helplessly in the floor while Samantha disappeared into the light. "Fox!" He could still hear her scream — every time he heard his first name spoken, he still heard Samantha's cries.

"No! It wasn't my fault!" he protested aloud. His heart was pounding and he could barely breathe. He had no idea where he was.

Whose fault was it, then? Whom did she cry to for help? Whom did Chris Beldock call for help?

It wasn't my fault, he repeated. I did what I could.

Well, you weren't helpless this time. What's your excuse now? Chris Beldock sat before him on the bathroom floor, eyes unseeing, blood pouring from his wrists. Blood everywhere, there was no stopping it. "It doesn't matter," Chris had said. "It's too late."

He was determined to die. I couldn't stop him.

Then why did he call you, if he didn't want you to stop him?

Mulder blinked hard, several times, trying to clear that awful vision from his sight. He wiped his hands on his pants, repeatedly, even though he'd washed his hands thoroughly back at Chris Beldock's flat. Macbeth, he thought crazily.

Shakespeare won't help you now.

"Who are you?" Mulder suddenly exclaimed. "You're not my voice. You're not me. Who are you?"

You know me.

"You killed those students."

They killed themselves.

But you made them do it. And now you're trying to make me.

Pretty stressed out, aren't you, Mulder?

He could still barely see. There was a halo around his vision from the street lights that blotted out everything else. He was on the sidewalk, wasn't he? Was that a tree, or a parking meter? He reached out to touch it, felt something cold and smooth and ... Or was it rough? It seemed to move under his hand, texture and temperature shifting so that he couldn't identify it.

You're really losing it now, Mulder.

My voice never calls me Mulder.

What does it call you then?

It doesn't have to call me anything. It is me.

Getting a little confused, aren't you?

Why can't I see anything? Are you doing that?

Really very confused.

He stumbled against something. A mailbox? Trash can? How was he going to find his way back to Chris Beldock's flat? He didn't know how long he'd been walking, or how far he'd gone. He didn't know San Francisco, and even if he did, he could barely see the sidewalk just beneath his feet, much less read street signs and recognize landmarks. Well, he knew the name of the hotel anyway. He'd just take a taxi back to the hotel.

But Scully was waiting for him. He hadn't acted very professionally, back there. He'd told the police to bring her there, then left her to handle the whole thing, while he ran out into the streets and got lost talking to himself. Or something. Well, Scully would understand. He could always

count on her, even though he knew he drove her crazy sometimes.

You'll go too far with her one day. Then she'll leave you too.

He ignored the voice, tired of arguing. He just wanted to find Scully and go home. If he could find a phone, maybe he could ask the operator for Chris Beldock's number and call her there. If he could find a phone ...

"Mulder? Mulder! Are you all right?"

But there was Scully, right there. He strained his aching eyes to find her. He could barely make out a cloud of red-gold where her hair should be and a shape that was vaguely Scully-like. He seemed to feel her grip on his arm.

"Scully. How did you find me?" He wasn't at all sure that he'd spoken out loud, or if his words were making any sense, but Scully answered him, so he must have.

"What do you mean? You're standing right in front of the flat."

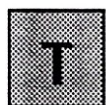
He tried to look around, saw nothing but shape and shadow. But he was sure he'd been walking ...? "I can't see very well. I think my eyes are ... too full of light." Blinding white light ... He recoiled from the image, jerking his arm out of Scully's grip.

Her hand felt for the pulse in his neck, then pulled up his eyelids. "Mulder, did you eat or drink anything while you were in Beldock's flat?"

Blood ... He nearly gagged. "Geeze, Scully."

"You act like you've been drugged. You may have gotten into something while you were in there. I'm taking you to a hospital."

He started to protest, then stopped. On second thought, a hospital sounded just fine.



here was a taxi ride. Scully kept trying to talk to him. He liked listening to her voice, but he didn't feel any desire to try to talk. Anyway, she was mostly asking him how he felt, a question he had no idea how to answer. Then there was an emergency room. Bright lights, antiseptic smell, loudspeakers

bleating, a lot of people rushing about. He'd been in emergency rooms before, although he wasn't generally the emergency. There was a bed and one of those embarrassing white hospital gowns. Needles and cold metal instruments. Gradually, his mind began to clear. The room around him came into focus; the frightening images slowly faded. He became aware of the mattress cushioning him and the cool smoothness of the sheets.

Scully was standing by the door with a serious young doctor. "The tests are all negative so far. But the physical symptoms are consistent with some sort of drug overdose."

"Will he be all right?" Scully asked. Her voice was calm and professional, but Mulder heard the undercurrent of worry.

The doctor shrugged. "Without knowing exactly what it was that he took, there's no way of knowing. But his vital signs are all strong and there's no sign of organ damage. There's no reason to think he won't recover."

Mulder recognized that the doctor was hedging his bets, in the usual doctor manner. Scully, a doctor herself, surely knew the answers as well as the other man. But now she was a concerned partner, not a doctor, and she wanted reassurance. Mulder decided to give it to her.

"Hey, Scully." He pushed himself up on his elbows and tried to muster a convincing smile. "Do you think if I'm real good they'll let me keep the outfit?"

She stared at him openmouthed. "Mulder. You're back."

"I think so."

She walked over to his bedside. "Do you remember what happened?"

"I remember everything. Just from a rather ... unusual perspective."

"Do you know how you could have gotten drugged?"

"I wasn't drugged." He'd been holding Chris Beldock by the arms when the boy died. Something that felt like an electric shock had run

through his body. And a voice that wasn't part of him reminded him of his worst failures. "I don't know what it is, Scully, but it's not drugs. It hit me right when Chris died. It's going to try to kill me."

Scully pursed her lips and looked away. "Mulder ..."

"Scully, I was there. I know what happened."

"You need to rest. You've had a big shock."

"Scully ..."

"Mulder, get some rest." She smiled at him, squeezed his arm reassuringly. "It's been a long night. I need some sleep, too."

Sleep. He suddenly realized how completely exhausted he was. "Good idea. Let's go back to the hotel." He started to push himself out of bed, but Scully pushed him back.

"The doctors want you to stay here tonight. Run some more tests, make sure you're all right. I'll come back tomorrow."

He was too tired to argue with her. And come to think of it, too tired to get out of bed, either. "You're the doctor, Dr. Scully."

As soon as he woke up, he knew. It hadn't been just stress, or exhaustion, or some sort of mystery drug overdose, or the shock of having a young student die in his arms. Something had entered him in Chris Beldock's apartment, something alive and evil, and it was still there, in little tendrils of malevolence curled around the edges of his mind. The Voice that had spoken to him last night, that had shown him visions of loss and death, that had clouded his mind until he couldn't see where he was, was a real, living presence, not a figment of his overwrought imagination. Oh, he had seen that vision of Samantha's disappearance before; hundreds of times it had played itself over in his mind, and it had been just as painful and just as frightening each time. And he had spent many predawn hours discussing his failings with his own voice of self-doubt, a voice that could be quite thoroughly nasty in its own way. But last night had been different. He didn't know exactly how to describe it; but he knew that the Voice that had spoken to him last night was not his own, just as

surely as he knew that he was Fox Mulder. And just as surely he knew that no one was going to believe him, not even Scully. He was on his own this time.

Scully showed up a little after noon to pick him up. The doctors had poked and prodded him all over again that morning, in every way they had the night before and a few new ways as well. It seemed he was completely, inexplicably healthy; whatever the unwelcome presence was, it left no detectable physical trace. But he felt fine, except for the disquieting knowledge that he was not alone in his own mind. And he was eager to get back to work.

Scully, bless her, had brought him a change of clothes, so he didn't have to put his bloodstained things back on. He sat up in bed to take the bundle of clothing from her. *Scully's had her hands on your underwear ...* He looked away from her.

"Shut up," he muttered under his breath, cheeks reddening.

"Mulder?"

"Nothing. I'll get changed, and we can get out of here."

She lifted an eyebrow but said nothing, just nodded and left the hospital room. He cursed under his breath as he dressed. That comment, he was forced to admit, might actually have been one of his own. And he was really going to be in trouble if he couldn't tell the difference.

Scully had spent the morning talking to friends of the dead students'; she was not in a particularly cheerful mood. She also was showing the strain of a sleepless night and a partner in the hospital. He would have liked to assure her that he was fine, but he was not at all sure that he was. He listened to her summary of the morning's investigations in silence.

"So it sounds like some sort of psychoactive drug affecting all the students, although no one will admit any knowledge of drug activity. But they all exhibited the same patterns of behavior — vision problems, hallucinations, claims of hearing voices — similar to what happened to you last night." They'd started walking away from the hospital,

and continued down the sidewalk, walking more to keep moving than to get somewhere.

"Scully, I wasn't on drugs."

"Then how do you explain your behavior?"

"I don't know. There was something ... I don't know what it is, but it is alive, it's a consciousness, and it's evil. It was in each of those students and it harassed and tormented them until they couldn't stand it any longer and they killed themselves."

"Mulder, drugs can have some pretty unusual psychological effects ..."

"I know that! But ... look at it realistically, Scully. I found Chris Beldock in the bathroom dying. I dialed 911 then tried to stop the bleeding with towels. When I knew it was too late, I called the police and asked them to bring you there. Then I sat with the body and waited for the paramedics and the police to arrive. I did not eat or drink or inhale anything. Exactly when and how could I have ingested any drugs?"

"Maybe it was absorbed through the skin."

"I didn't touch anything either, except the phone and some towels and Chris himself. Are you suggesting the towels were drugged? Or the phone?"

"No. I don't know. It might have been in the bath water. Or in the air. Or on Chris's skin. I don't know! But I don't think that's any harder to believe than that it was some sort of demon that passed from Chris's mind to yours."

"I believe it because it happened to me. It went into my mind and it's still there. I know what happened, Scully! Can't you believe, even when it's me it's happened to?"

They'd been walking ever faster as their conversation became more intense. Now, abruptly, Mulder stopped and turned to face Scully. His face was grim and his fists clenched. He had to make Scully believe him; how could he fight this thing without her help? But he already knew he would not be able to convince her. Scully had fastened on drugs as a reasonable explanation for everything, and she wasn't going to give that up for some nebulous malevolent

entity without a lot more concrete proof than he could give her.

Her blue eyes searched his face. "Mulder, it's not a question of believing you. I just ... interpret the evidence differently, that's all."

He turned and strode away, leaving Scully to hurry to catch up with him. "I'm sorry, Mulder. You know how I feel about these things."

"I know. Forget it."

"Well. What next? The autopsy report on Chris Beldock should be ready soon."

He pressed his fingers to the bridge of his nose. "No. It won't tell us anything. Let's go back to Washington."

Now it was Scully's turn to stop. "This isn't like you. To give up in the middle of a case."

"I'm not giving up." He smiled wryly. "I'm taking the case with me. I *am* the case now."

They'd only spent two days in California; not long enough to get over their jet lag, just long enough to give them jet lag on their return as well. Mulder had several bad episodes on the plane, when his vision narrowed and blurred and his mind clouded, but he just gritted his teeth and gripped the armrests until he returned to normal. While he waited out the attacks, he had the vague impression of sardonic laughter whispering at the back of his mind, but the Voice didn't speak. He had the sensation that it was playing with him, teasing him, just giving him little tastes of what was to come.

From the airport he went directly to his office, although it was already late. He pored over his files until his eyes stopped focusing – from exhaustion this time – but found nothing that could be related to his case. Well, he'd have at least two weeks to figure out what was happening to him – all the students had lasted at least that long. And he had an advantage over them, he thought. He was older and more experienced in unusual phenomena. And he knew he wasn't crazy. He knew that an outside force was responsible for what was happening to him. He didn't know how to fight it yet, but he would. Exhausted but unable to sleep he spent his first

night back in Washington wrapped in a blanket on his couch, watching old movies and trying not to think.

The days passed by in a haze. Mulder managed to get a little sleep — not enough, but it kept him from collapsing at his desk. The Voice continued to remind him of how weak, stupid, and incompetent he was at every opportunity. He honestly wasn't sure whether he was getting any work done or not, most of the time he couldn't remember from hour to hour what he was supposed to be doing. He knew he was making no headway against his problem. The Voice wouldn't let him forget it.

F **BI Headquarters
Washington, D.C.**

He was walking down the hall to his office when the vision hit. Suddenly everything went white and there was a roaring in his ears. Then he was standing in a cold warehouse with a gun in his hand. John Barnett was no more than six feet away, and Mulder had a clear shot at him. But Barnett was holding a hostage, gun at the man's head, and FBI policy said that he could not shoot. There were six other agents ranged in front of Barnett. Mulder held his fire, knowing that Barnett was trapped. He would have to give up. All Mulder had to do was wait —

But Barnett didn't see it that way. Abruptly, he shot the hostage, tossed the body aside, and opened fire on the agents in front of him. Mulder fired. And the other agents fired. Barnett fell. But not before Steve Wallenberg collapsed and died. A young agent with a wife and two small children. Dead, because Mulder had waited.

Another one you let down ...

"I did what I was supposed to do." Mulder's voice echoed in his own ears, ragged and desperate.

You were supposed to stand by and let Barnett shoot down two people?

I had no way of knowing he was going to do that.

Didn't you?

"It was not my fault." How often had he told himself that? And how often had he cursed himself for not firing his gun five seconds sooner?

Steve Wallenberg's funeral procession stepped somberly across his cloudy vision. The grief-stricken young widow wept inconsolably. "Cary, I'm sorry. I'd give anything to have been able to save him."

How many people did Barnett kill after you let him live?

Reggie. And he'd damn near gotten Scully, too.

Your path is littered with the dead.

"No!" Mulder pressed up against the wall behind him, pounding it with his fists.

"Mulder?" Scully grasped his arm. The vision fell away and he was once again in the hall outside his office. He shook his head tiredly.

"It was Barnett this time."

"Barnett? Mulder, you know he's dead, you were there when he died."

He smiled weakly at her. "No, I meant, it showed me Barnett." He leaned back against the wall again and sighed. "It was like I was living through it all over again. Just like in San Francisco."

"Mulder, you need to get help."

"I went to the hospital in San Francisco. They couldn't find anything."

"Try again. They might have missed something the first time."

"They didn't miss anything. There's nothing there that hospital tests can find."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"I'm sure." He closed his eyes, was immediately assailed by fragmented visions, and opened them again. Cruel laughter whispered in his ears. He slammed his head against the wall in frustration. "Scully, help me!"

She looked away, swallowing back her own panic. "I'm trying to help you. I don't know what to do."

"Help me find out what this is. Help me find out how to get rid of it."

She gestured toward the office, led the way back to it in silence, closing the door after they were inside. "Mulder, you know what I think. This is some sort of drug reaction. You need a doctor."

"Scully, why can't you accept the possibility that it might be something else? You've made up your mind that it's drugs and you won't even consider that there could be any other explanation."

"I could say the same thing to you. You're determined to believe this is some sort of supernatural possession. Have you considered any other possibilities?"

"It is my mind. I know when there's something in it that doesn't belong there."

"All right. All right." Scully took a deep breath, tried to smile. "It's your mind. We'll play it your way. What do you want to do about it?"

He stood there, trying to think.

So what are you going to do about it?

He sighed. "I don't know."

That night he sat at the kitchen counter with a soggy half-eaten grilled cheese sandwich in front of him and considered what Scully had said. All right, never let it be said that he didn't have an open mind. Suppose it was a drug. Never mind how he'd gotten it. Somehow, in Chris's apartment, he'd ingested a big dose of some sort of exotic psychoactive drug. The blood tests hadn't shown anything, but they might not have known what to test for. Or the drug was effective in such minute quantities that it didn't show up on tests. It was possible. The students had been cooking up some new designer drug – one that turned out to have some effects they hadn't counted on. Of course they wouldn't admit it to the police, or to the FBI. Especially when it had gotten some of their friends killed.

But if it were drugs, why had only one student at a time been affected? And why just the one who had seen the last one die? Could other students have been taking it, too? Perhaps not everyone suffered the extreme reaction to it. The suicides had all been close friends. Perhaps it was grief that triggered the deadly reaction. The rest might just be coincidence.

But what kind of drug had effects that lasted for two weeks? Surely the students wouldn't be foolish enough to continue taking a drug that was making them paranoid and suicidal. And he certainly hadn't been exposed to any drug after that night in Chris Beldock's apartment. That had been ... four nights ago now. Or was it five? Anyway, more than long enough for any drug, no matter how strong, to wear off. He'd never heard of any mind-altering substance with effects that lasted more than twenty-four hours. Flashbacks? He knew that true flashbacks were very rare. And didn't occur repeatedly, day after day. But if this really were some new, unknown drug, who could say what the effects would be?

He couldn't disprove the drug theory. But he just couldn't make himself believe in it, either. He didn't have any concrete evidence except his own conviction that he knew what was happening in his own mind. And it seemed very important to him to hang onto that conviction. The Voice was preying on his self-doubt, using it to try to gain control of his mind. He felt that if he let his faith in himself waver, it would destroy him. So he would go on believing that the Voice was real. But that still didn't tell him how to fight it. Discouraged, he got up, tossed the remains of his sandwich into the garbage, and went into the living room, yawning and rubbing the back of his neck. If he could only get some sleep, he might be able to make some sense of this.

He switched on the TV, found ESPN, and lay down on the couch.

Hours later, he was up and prowling like a caged cat from living room to kitchen and back again. He hadn't been able to lie still for more than a few minutes, and sleep had never come near. He'd drunk so much decaf his stomach was queasy. It didn't help that he'd barely eaten in days. His head throbbed. He felt like he would never sleep again.

He threw himself down on the couch, determined to try to relax, but moments later he jumped up and dashed into the bathroom, sure he was going to throw up. After a few uneasy minutes, the feeling passed. His head felt ready to explode. He dug in the medicine cabinet for an aspirin, found none. Just as well, it would probably only make his stomach worse. He went back into the kitchen and poured himself a glass of milk. After

a few swallows, he couldn't drink any more, so he put the glass back into the refrigerator.

You know who you're acting like, don't you?

Chris Beldock. But I won't kill myself, like he did.

Do you really think you're that much stronger than he was?

Strong enough. And I know who you are.

You don't know anything. You're not even convinced that Scully isn't right.

I considered the possibility. That's only reasonable. And I rejected it. It didn't fit the facts.

You're barely sane anymore. How do you know what the facts are?

I still know what's real.

He went into the living room, trying to escape the Voice. ESPN was still on, an auto race roaring. Mulder turned it up.

So you know what's real, do you?

The announcer appeared on the screen, describing the leader of the contest. "He's got what it takes to win a race like this." Then he turned to stare directly at Mulder, a malevolent grin on his face. "But I'm afraid you're going to crash and burn, Mulder. There's no way you can win this one."

Mulder snatched up the remote and turned the television off. The afterimage of the announcer's sardonic smile lingered far longer than it should. I watch too much TV anyway, he thought, refusing to let the vision shake him. Anybody could get a little shaky after so many days without sleep. But now the silence was heavy and oppressive, too inviting for the Voice to fill up. He walked across the room, turned on the radio on the desk.

"Seasons don't fear the reaper,
Nor do the wind and the sun and the rain
(We can be like they are)
Come on baby,
(Don't fear the reaper)
Baby take my hand..."

He switched off the radio, hand shaking. Either that was one very amazing coincidence –

Or he couldn't trust any of his senses any more.

He snatched up the telephone, jabbed out a number, then began to pace the length of the phone cord while he counted out the rings.

"Hello?" She sounded half asleep.

"Scully, turn on your radio. WCXR. Tell me what song is playing."

"WCXR?"

"CXR 105.9. Hurry, Scully, please." He heard a snatch of something classical, then the bursts of static that came between stations as she tuned the radio. Thank God, she was not going to demand explanations, she just did what he asked. But time was slipping away, and Scully was having a hard time finding the station.

"Is this it? I think it's Pink Floyd."

He turned his own radio back on –

And a blood-curdling scream split the air –

But it was just the sheep, turning on their master. "Sheep," from Pink Floyd's *Animals* album. Not a very cheerful song, either. But did that mean that "Reaper" had never been there, or was he just too late and the song was over? Suddenly, he felt very foolish. He'd wakened Scully for nothing. "I'm sorry, Scully. I shouldn't have bothered you. It's too late. It doesn't matter."

And who does that sound like?

Mulder felt a chill of fear as he realized that Chris Beldock had used almost those exact words when he had called Mulder that night ...

"Mulder, it's 4:00 in the morning. You didn't just call me for no reason. Tell me what's going on."

Well, he'd made a mess of it already. He might as well tell her. "When I turned the radio on a few minutes ago, they were playing 'Don't Fear the Reaper.' I thought it was too much of a coincidence. I just wanted to make sure someone else heard it too."

"Don't Fear the Reaper?"

"Come on, Scully, you're not that much younger than me. Blue Oyster Cult. It's a classic. It's got to be one of the most well-known songs about suicide ever written."

A pause. "Well, maybe you should listen to some real classics. And maybe you wouldn't have this problem."

He smiled in spite of himself. "With my luck, they'd be playing Mahler's Ninth."

Scully laughed. Her laugh warmed him like sunshine. Wonderful Scully! Not only did she get the joke about Mahler's Ninth – the symphony that Mahler wrote about his impending death – but she even laughed at it in the middle of the night. Suddenly, he felt much better. His knees wobbled, and he let himself sink slowly to the floor.

"Thanks, Scully. Go back to sleep now."

"Wait. Why don't we wait until this song is over? They might back-announce it."

"Do you know how long this song is? It's got to be ten minutes, at least." But the scream came near the end of the song, didn't it? That meant it had been playing for six or seven minutes already – and it couldn't have been more than a minute or two since he'd called Scully ... The fear began to creep back.

"I don't mind. I'm already awake."

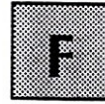
Mulder was now sure that "Don't Fear the Reaper" had not really been on the radio. But Scully's presence on the other end of the telephone line was soothing; he didn't really want to hang up. "Okay. Let's wait."

So they listened. But when "Sheep" was over, another song began. Mulder and Scully were both yawning into the phone. "Let's forget it, Scully. Thanks. I'll see you tomorrow."

"You sure you're all right?"

"I'm all right. Go back to sleep." He fumbled the receiver back into its cradle from where he sat in the floor. Too tired now to even crawl back onto

the couch, he simply slumped down to lie where he was and sank into unconsciousness.



BI Headquarters Washington, D.C.

Mulder was late for work the next day.

His hip and shoulder ached from sleeping in the floor, and he had a splitting headache. Despite the sleep, he felt no better. His mind was still cloudy and he kept seeing flashes of light out of the corner of his eye. He'd been tempted to call in sick, but what good would that do? He had to keep working if he was going to find a solution to his problem. And anyway, he felt better when Scully was around –

Even when she was regarding him dubiously, with a look at once concerned and disapproving that plainly told him that he looked like hell.

"I called WCXR this morning. 'Don't Fear the Reaper' wasn't on last night's playlist, although the station manager said that the late-night deejays don't always follow the playlist. I got the deejay's phone number, but he'll be asleep now. We can call him later this afternoon."

Mulder settled into his chair, suppressed the urge to lay his head on his desk. "I hope you didn't tell him ..."

"That my partner was afraid he was having audio hallucinations? No, of course not. I told him we were checking an alibi."

Mulder nodded. "Thanks for checking, Scully, but I don't think it's necessary to call the deejay."

"No? I'd think, if you were having hallucinations you'd want to know about it."

"I already know I'm having hallucinations. Just before I turned on the radio, a TV announcer looked me right in the eye and told me I was going to die. Called me by name, too. I didn't have to check with anyone to know that one wasn't real."

Scully stood at the corner of his desk and regarded him for a long moment before speaking. "And you think that this ... presence in your mind is causing these hallucinations?"

"Scully, it's been five days now since Chris Beldock died. If I had, somehow, gotten drugged



while I was there, wouldn't it have worn off by now?"

"Actually, it's been six days. And yes, it should have. Unless ..." She paused, frowning.

"Unless what?"

"Unless I don't know what. So all right, maybe it wasn't drugs. Maybe it's some sort of virus, or ..."

"Scully, that doesn't make any sense either. What kind of virus only affects one person at a time? And hits you with visions within minutes of infection? And doesn't show up in any hospital tests?"

"I don't know, I ..." Scully paced restlessly from one end of the room to the other, frustration and worry etched in her face. She stopped in front of Mulder and spoke grimly. "Mulder, I look at you, and ... You haven't slept in days. You don't eat. You're hearing voices, hallucinating. I don't know what's happening to you. But if it's a drug, or a virus, or something real, maybe I can figure out what to do about it. If it's not ..." She shook her head, and shrugged. "I just feel so helpless."

"Me, too." He smiled crookedly.

"I wish you would see a doctor. At least, he could help you get some sleep."

To sleep, perchance to dream ...

"No. I don't think I want any sleeping pills in my house."

They stared at each other for a long moment. "None of the students used drugs to commit suicide ..." Scully said, looking very uncomfortable. Neither of them mentioned the Glock 19 that Mulder carried in his holster. He was hardly without means to commit suicide, if it should come to that.

"I don't even have any aspirin at home." He rubbed his temple with the heel of his hand. "I could use some right now."

Scully dug in her purse, and pulled out a small bottle. "Well, at least I can help you with that." She handed him the pills. "I'll get you some water."

The next thing he knew, Mulder was slumped forward onto his desk, head cradled in his arms. He lifted his head slowly. Sharp pains shot behind his eyes. Scully was perched on the edge of his desk watching him.

"Hey, Scully," he mumbled. "Where's that aspirin?"

She gestured toward the glass and the pills on the desk in front of him. "You've been out for over two hours."

"What ...?" He swallowed the pain pills. Turning his head to look at the wall clock send slivers of pain between his temples. It was nearly noon. "Why didn't you wake me?"

"I thought you could use the rest." She paused, seemed to be considering whether or not to continue. "I've been watching you."

He forced a weak laugh. "That must have been fun."

"You woke up three times, for just a few seconds, then went right back to sleep. Other than that, you haven't moved a muscle. It looked more like a coma than normal sleep."

"I don't remember waking up ..."

"I'm not surprised. Mulder, have you dreamed lately?"

He stared at her blankly.

"Since you got back from San Francisco. Have you had any dreams?"

He felt like he was constantly dreaming. "I don't know. I don't remember." But usually he remembered dreaming. Lately, if he slept at all, it was just an empty blackness. "I don't think so."

"That would explain your symptoms. The hallucinations, the voices. Deprivation of REM sleep is known to induce psychosis."

No dreams ... He knew, of course, what the effects of REM sleep deprivation were. Didn't he? He couldn't seem to keep his mind from wandering. "Wasn't this a *Star Trek* episode?"

She smiled a brief, pained smile. "Try and stay with me, Mulder. Whatever this is that's happening to you, it seems to be suppressing your REM sleep cycle."

"Aliens. On *Star Trek*, it was aliens."

"All right, aliens. In any case, you need to dream."

"Okay." He lay his head back down on the desk. Scully's hand on his shoulder gently pulled him back upright.

"Mulder, sleep won't help you, if you don't dream."

He rubbed his eyes, tried to force his mind to work. Scully was right. He couldn't just lie down and hope it went away. There had to be an answer to all this somewhere. So go over it all again, from the beginning.

"Susan Hardesty."

"Mulder?"

"She was the first. Susan Hardesty slit her wrists. She died in the arms of her boyfriend, Val Kochanski. Val shot himself and was found dying by his friend Jerry Fisher. Jerry jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge. Chris Beldock tried to catch him on the way down. Then Chris Beldock slit his wrists."

"And died in the arms of an overstressed, highly imaginative FBI agent."

"Who immediately starts hallucinating and stops having dreams."

"So what's it all mean, Mulder?" Scully sat on the edge of the desk, arms crossed, an intense expression on her face.

"I don't know. I don't know." He rubbed his temples. "But don't you see, it has to be more than just four depressed students killing themselves."

"Something stopped them from dreaming."

"Something that doesn't show up in medical examinations and blood tests."

"Somehow they passed it from one to the other."

"Susan to Val to Jerry to ..." He paused, frowned. "Scully, how did Susan get it?"

She shook her head slightly. "There was no evidence of anything unusual happening to her before her suicide. Nothing that could have triggered the strange behavior."

"What was she doing two weeks before she died? Where did she go? Whom did she see?" Mulder sat up, alert now. "We have to find out, Scully. What happened to Susan Hardesty? That's the answer."

"Just a minute." Scully got up and found her notes on the case, still sitting on top of the file cabinet. "Susan Hardesty spent most of her spare time with Val Kochanski. They liked going to movies, walking in Golden Gate Park. They went rollerblading on weekends ... Two weeks before she died, she'd spent the weekend with her parents. They live in Stockton."

"That's it, Scully! What happened while she was at her parents'?"

Scully scrutinized the page, shook her head. "Nothing. Nothing that anyone knew about, anyway. She might have told Val something, but ..."

"We need to talk to her parents."

Scully nodded, stood up decisively. "I'll go to Stockton, see what I can find out."

Mulder started to stand. A wave of dizziness hit him, and he fell back into his chair. "I'll go with you." He pushed himself determinedly to his feet.

"Mulder, you're in no shape to travel across the country. You can barely get out of your chair. I can handle this by myself."

"I want to go with you," he insisted. But he was holding onto the edge of the desk to help keep himself upright.

"Don't be foolish. Look at yourself."

"It's my life, Scully. I need to be there. I know what questions to ask."

"I can handle this." She glared at him. "Don't you think I know how to conduct an investigation? Just because I don't see UFOs behind every tree doesn't mean I can't ask the right questions." Her voice was sharp with sarcasm. "You're not the only FBI agent around here."

"Scully ..." He bit his lip. As much as he knew that she was lashing out from worry and fear, her words still hurt. And he did trust her. That wasn't it at all. But how could he tell her that the real reason he wanted to go with her was that he was just plain scared to be left here alone? "I know you can handle it. I just ..."

She sighed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that." She leaned forward impulsively and put a hand on his arm. "I promise you, if there's an answer, I'll find it. No matter what it is."

Mulder sat on his couch, wrapped in his blanket. There was an old detective movie flickering in black and white on the TV. He was having a hard time keeping up with the plot, his mind kept wandering, and he suspected that he was falling in and out of consciousness every once in a while as well. Of course it was a pretty safe bet that the icy blonde wasn't what she pretended to be. "You can never trust the blondes," he told the beleaguered detective. "Next time, find a redhead." Scully must be in California by now. She had insisted on driving him home before she left for the airport. He'd had to fight against the urge to plead with her not to leave him.

The next time he opened his eyes, the movie was over and another one had begun. He pushed off

the blanket and went into the kitchen. The jar of instant coffee was empty. Brew a pot, or make tea instead? He wanted coffee, but the effort to brew a whole pot seemed overwhelming. And the ground coffee wasn't decaf. Not that it mattered at this point — he wasn't sleeping anyway. Besides, the tea wasn't decaffeinated, either. He yawned, drank a glass of water, and returned to the living room.

Had Scully said six days? Already it seemed that he'd been living like this forever, existing in some sort of twilight zone, half-awake and half-asleep, unable to think, eat, sleep, dream ... How long could one exist without dreams?

For the first time, he considered the possibility that he would not survive this. He had been assuming that, no matter how long it took, eventually he would figure out a way to defeat the Voice; that no matter how miserable it made him, it couldn't force him to commit suicide if he was determined to stay alive. But if it could stop him from dreaming, it could destroy his mind. He had only a few more days left. Then he would no longer be able to resist it. The Voice would win.

He would become the fifth victim, and the Voice would go on to destroy another life. And who was the next victim most likely to be?

Scully. If he finally couldn't hold out any longer, and made one last call for help, it was Scully he would call. And Scully who'd arrive as he lay dying, who'd touch his arm or his face and feel that electric shock, and then start to relive all the most shameful and difficult experiences of her life ... She'd hear the Voice. And finally she'd have to admit that supernatural things did exist ...

No. No. Not Scully. He must not allow it to happen. No matter what became of him, Scully must not be harmed.

But if he lost his mind, how could he prevent himself from calling her? Any more than he could stop himself from committing suicide?

He wrapped his blanket close around himself and drew his knees up. Perhaps it was already too late for him. Even if Scully found out what the Voice was, that didn't mean they'd know how to defeat it. But no matter what happened to him, he must make sure that the Voice could not transfer itself

to a new victim, Scully or anyone else. Let it die, here, with him.

Are you giving up?

It is what you want, isn't it?

Barely a week. And you claimed to be stronger than the others.

It's not that. It's for Scully.

How noble. Do you think she'd do the same for you?

Yes. I don't know. It doesn't matter, I'll do it for her.

She doesn't really care about you. "Spooky" Mulder. She thinks you're crazy.

No she doesn't. At least, she didn't, before you came along.

Overstressed. And over-imaginative. A very nice way of putting it, but you know what she meant.

She's trying to help me. Just because she doesn't believe, it doesn't mean she doesn't care.

Oh well, she'll be better off without you, anyway.

That's not true. She wants to be my partner.

You've been a drag on her career since the day she started working with you. How far could she have gone by now, if she hadn't been labelled as "Mrs. Spooky?"

She could have left any time she wanted to. She chose to stay with the X-Files.

Do you think she'll stay with the project after you're gone?

I don't know. It doesn't matter. As long as she's all right.

Mulder threw off the blanket and stumbled to his feet. He didn't want to argue with the Voice any more. He didn't want to fight and he didn't want to think about it. He just wanted it to be over. Anyway, the Voice was right about one thing. Scully would be better off without him. Now, where was his gun ...?

He paused with the Glock in his hand. He was forgetting something, wasn't he? How could he be sure that this would destroy the Voice? He had assumed that physical contact was necessary for the Voice to transfer from one person to another. From Susan to Val to Jerry to Chris ... And to him. But what about Susan? He still didn't know how it had gotten to her. Maybe it didn't need a living person to survive. Or a physical touch to transfer. In that case, he'd be doing this for nothing. And it still might get Scully.

He put the gun back in its holster. He would wait until Scully got back, to see what she found out. One more day. He could wait for one more day.

The ringing phone brought him out of a deep sleep and halfway off the couch before he was quite awake. "Hello?" His heart was pounding from the abrupt awakening.

"Mulder?" A pause. "Are you all right?"

"Scully. Where are you?"

"I'm at the airport. I just got here."

"The airport? Which airport?" Was she just arriving in San Francisco? He thought she'd have gotten there hours ago.

"I'm at Dulles, Mulder. I've been gone for a day. I'm just getting back."

He looked at his watch. Eleven-thirty. P.m. He'd lost nearly a whole day. He shivered. "Oh. So ... How'd it go?"

"Mulder, are you sure you're all right?"

"Yeah, I'm just ... I was asleep." He rubbed his eyes. Okay, so he'd slept a day away. It could have been worse. "I'm okay. What did you find out?"

"Do you want me to come over?"

"No. Just tell me."

There was a pause. He could hear the faint airport echo of voices in the background. "All right. I spoke to Susan Hardesty's mother this morning."

"What about her father? Did you talk to him?"

"Her father's dead. He died two weeks before Susan did." She took a deep breath. "He committed suicide."

"John Hardesty was a trial lawyer," Scully continued. "Very successful. He rarely lost a case. He was also an angry and bitter man. He browbeat and terrorized his wife and daughter. Susan's mother tried to leave him several times, but he always intimidated her into staying. Finally, she made up her mind that she would leave him for good. But she wanted Susan to be there when she told him, for moral support."

"The morning after Susan arrived for her weekend visit, Clara Hardesty told her husband she was leaving. They argued for hours. Finally, Susan and her mother went out, leaving John Hardesty at home alone. They went shopping, went to a movie. When they returned home, they found Susan's father in the bathroom with his wrists cut."

Mulder's vision had gone completely white. There was a rushing sound in his ears and tendrils of something very angry whipping around the edges of his mind. "He was dead?"

"No, he was still alive when they found him. Susan's mother is sure he didn't really mean to kill himself, he was just trying to frighten her into staying with him. But he miscalculated, cut too deep, and he was dying when they returned. In the ambulance, as long as he remained conscious, he railed at them. He told Susan's mother it was all her fault, and threatened Susan that she'd better not let him die, or ..."

"Or what, Scully? What did he tell Susan?"

I know who you are, he thought.

"He said, if she let him die, he'd kill her."

You're John Hardesty.

"He refused to die. It's John Hardesty. He won't die, he's living in other people's minds, but he's so angry and hurt, he just keeps killing himself over and over again." Something howled in rage behind his eyes. I know who you are.

"Mulder, I know what you're thinking, but ..."



"Scully, just one more thing. Did Susan touch him before he died?"

"Mulder, listen to me ..."

"Please, just tell me. Did she?"

She sighed into the phone. "She sat beside him in the ambulance and held his hand all the way to the hospital. Her mother said ..." She hesitated. Mulder could almost see her, biting her lip, wondering if she should tell him everything. He waited. "Something must have gone wrong with the monitoring equipment. Susan jumped up, called out in pain. She told her mother later that it felt like an electric shock. It was right before her father died."

That was all he needed to know. "He has to touch them. Thanks, Scully. I know what to do now."

"Mulder, what are you talking about?"

"It's all right, Scully. Don't worry about me. I know what I have to do. He won't hurt anybody any more."

"Mulder, what are you planning to do? You're not going to do anything stupid, are you?"

"It's all right. It's too late. It doesn't matter any more."

"Don't do anything. I'm coming over."

"No! Scully, don't come here. Please don't come. I don't want you to get hurt."

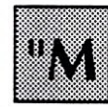
"Mulder, you're scaring me. Tell me you're not planning to kill yourself!"

"I ..." Just lie to her, tell her anything, don't let her come here, he thought. But he couldn't lie to Scully. "It doesn't matter."

"Mulder, listen to me. Don't you dare kill yourself. Do you hear me, Fox Mulder? Don't you dare kill yourself! I'll never forgive you if you do!" She was screaming into the phone. I've never heard her scream before, he thought. Her voice cut right into his soul, blotting out that other voice completely.

It hit him like an electric shock. He gasped, doubled over in pain, dropping the phone. The

room was spinning. *Mulder! Mulder!* he heard a voice screaming. But it was only Scully, her voice still audible through the telephone in the floor. Then he was falling. He was unconscious before he hit the floor.



ulder. Mulder, wake up."

He groaned and fumbled for the phone. But Scully was right there, leaning over him, slapping his face.

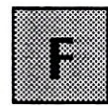
"Scully. Quit hitting me." He batted at her hand.

She sat back on her heels, with a short, relieved laugh. "Mulder, are you all right? You scared the hell out of me."

"I'm okay. I was dreaming about the Beltway ..." He was dreaming. He truly was all right. "It's gone, Scully. You killed it."

"That's good, Mulder. Lie still. An ambulance is on its way."

"No, really, I'm all right." He tried to sit up, but Scully pushed him firmly back down. Well, another night in the hospital wouldn't hurt. But he knew it was over now. The Voice was gone.



BI Headquarters Washington, D.C.

Scully stood beside his desk, looking at him over the sheaf of papers in her hand, her cheeks tinged with pink. "You're not seriously going to turn in this report, are you?"

Mulder grinned at her. He'd spent one night in the hospital, gotten a clean bill of health, then gone home and slept for most of three days. He'd even slept in his bed. He felt positively perky. "Why not? It is what happened."

"You make me sound like ... 'Scully the Demonslayer'."

"You saved my life, whether you believe it or not. I'm not going to pretend it didn't happen." He still wasn't sure exactly how or why the Voice had fled. Had Scully's voice just been more powerful? Maybe his finding out who it was had weakened it; maybe it had just run out of strength after four deaths — five, including Hardesty's own. In any case, Mulder knew that right up until the moment that Scully had ordered him not to, he had fully

intended to kill himself. Realizing how easily he had been brought to that point still gave him chills.

She shook her head, face reddening further. "You're making too much of it. All you needed was a few good nights' sleep."

"You still don't believe what happened was real, do you? What do you think, I just had some sort of psychotic episode?"

She regarded him for a long time, chewing her lip thoughtfully. Finally, with a slightly sheepish smile, she said, "Do you mind very much if I don't answer that question?"

Mulder started to protest, then shook his head and laughed. No, it didn't really matter whether she believed or not. She was Scully.

Mulder woke from a long, complicated dream involving a forest, some heavy machinery, and two of his old girlfriends. He buried his face deeper in the pillow, and tried to pull the rapidly dissolving strands of the dream back together. I'm not awake, he thought. I'm trying to climb a tree in a bulldozer. But the dream was gone, and he was lying on the couch in his living room, and it was 4:00 in the morning again.

He sat up, ran his hand through his hair, and frowned at the television. An earnest young woman was reading the news. "Sorry, I don't want to know." He got up and headed into the kitchen.

Why do you even bother to own a bed?

If all I had was the couch, I wouldn't be able to sleep there either.

There was a brand new extra large jar of instant decaf on the counter. A full bottle of aspirin in the cupboard. His favorite mug was sparkling clean. He was far enough ahead on his sleep that he didn't feel too exhausted. If he managed to get back to sleep within an hour or two, he'd actually feel all right that day. He turned on the heat under the kettle, humming to himself. Then he realized that the song was "Don't Fear the Reaper."

Are you sure your brain is all right?

Who cares? It's a great song.

Just don't start singing it around Scully.

I'll hum Mahler's Ninth to her.

She'll have you in a straightjacket for sure.

Just as long as she's the doctor ...

He spooned instant into his mug, smiling to himself. He'd have to dig out his Blue Oyster Cult album one of these days and play the whole song through. He hadn't heard it in ages. Not really heard it, anyway. Maybe tomorrow. Right now, he'd just have one cup of coffee. Then he'd go to bed.

Call for Papers

The champions

"Sharron. Richard."

Richard Barrett glanced up from the report on his desk and rubbed a weary hand over his tired eyes. He blinked once, twice, shook his head. "Mmmm?" he answered the telepathic call absently.

"Richard, where's Sharron?" Craig Stirling's voice demanded in his head.

"Don't know. Sharron, darling, are you there?" he directed at the missing third of their triumvirate, his lips still as his mind reached out.

"Mmmm," purred a sleepy voice in Richard Barrett's mind. He smiled. Of course. It was Saturday, when normal people would be having a lie in. Only Sharron wasn't normal, not quite. No more than he or Craig were. She was just better at faking it.

"All right, Craig, you've got our attention – just. What's going on?" Richard asked.

"Have you checked through your mail this morning?"

"My secretary delivered the post before she left for the morning – I haven't looked through it yet," Richard replied, rummaging through the neatly stacked pile of envelopes in his in-tray. "Why?"

"Check it."

"Postman's been, I haven't been down to collect it yet," Sharron murmured sleepily.

"Go get it."

Sharron grumbled, but the disconnect of her contact with them indicated she was doing as Craig had ordered.

"My, my, we're a bit tetchy this morning, aren't we?" Richard chuckled, sifting through the envelopes. "What am I looking for?"

"Large white envelope."

Richard plucked a large white envelope, about A4 size, from his stack of mail. He handled it curiously; like all his mail, it remained unopened. His secretary didn't have the clearance to view much of his mail, so she always left it sealed for him to deal with. What she didn't see, didn't get her in trouble with the Official Secrets Act.

"Georgetown Institute. Your side of the pond," Richard observed, studying the insignia on the upper left-hand corner of the envelope. It was addressed correctly to him, and that in itself was curious. As head of one of Britain's most secret security agencies, his name wasn't well-known, and his address was a matter of national security. As was Craig Stirling's as an upper-level operative in the CIA. As was Sharron MacCready's, although she had retired from the shadowy world of espionage a few years earlier.

"Yeah. D.C. area. Think tank, kind of earthy-crunchy. At least, that's what I thought," Craig answered ominously.

"Oh?"

"Open it."

"Ja vohl," Richard agreed, tearing at the flap sealing the large envelope. He slid out a letter neatly typed on a textured sheet of white paper, and read the missive with growing concern. "An invitation? To a paranormal conference?"

"Yeah. How do you suppose they chose us? Sharron, are you back yet?"

"Yes, Craig," Sharron's voice replied worriedly. "What is this? How did they find us? How did they *know* about us?"

"I don't know. Mine arrived yesterday. I launched a security check on the Institute – they have a paranormal unit, mostly harmless on the surface. One man really, a Dr. Jonathan MacKensie – he's helped out occasionally by some tabloid journalist who specializes in zombies and stuff. They've documented a few cases of unexplained phenomena, nothing really earth-shattering.

Nothing like us. This Julianna Moorhouse — she checks out. Ditto Jonathan MacKensie, head of the unit. In fact, his father Leonard was a Nobel winner. Physics. High-level clearance."

"Military connection?" Richard suggested.

"None. Purely theoretical. The current MacKensie's a doctor of anthropology."

"He'd have a field day with us, then. D'you suppose he's the one who —"

"No. I checked. Physical anthropology. No interest in ancient cultures. No history of contact with Tibet. Believe me, I dug on this one. Dug deep."

"And?"

"There was nothing to find."

"There's always something to find, Craig. There's no way this Moorhouse woman could know about us — not even Tremayne knew about us. The only way someone could even suspect would be if they'd had contact with the Hidden City —"

"None, I tell you. MacKensie's never been to that part of the world. There'd be records, records I could tap into. Records that weren't there to be found."

"Then how do you suppose this Dr. Moorhouse identified us, located us? We're not exactly in the book, you know," Sharron protested.

Richard stretched his neck, trying to work out the kinks, and it was then that he saw her. Tall, ethereal, face framed with honey-blond hair, figure draped in a dress of floating sapphire blue, she stood silently in the doorway to his office.

"Excuse me, but this area is off-limits —" he warned her, dropping into verbal speech.

"Richard, what's wrong?" Sharron demanded in his mind.

"Richard?" Craig called.

"It's all right," the woman said softly. "Your secret is safe. I sent the invitation. And like you, my existence is secret, my mission ... classified. But

we have a task to perform, you and your friends, I and mine."

He didn't bother to deny the invitation; he still gripped the letter in his hand. Instead, he cocked his head, studied her a moment, nodded to her as he realized that she was no more a normal human being than he'd been since the day the Tibetans had altered his mind and body. He knew that Craig and Sharron could hear through his mind, through the link that bound them together, even after all these years. He sent them a wordless reassurance, and the pair of them fell silent, listening. "A task?" he asked.

She inclined her head once. "All around you, the next generation of your species is struggling to be born. Children are making the leap to the next evolutionary level. Some have survived to adulthood, many more have perished. They, too, will be attending this conference. I made sure they received invitations like yours. You and your companions are needed — to show them the way."

"The way?"

"The way to survive. To develop their powers, to protect themselves from the humans who would study them, dissect them, destroy them. Without you, they may not survive long enough for their species to take hold."

"Their species. Not human, then."

"*Homo superior*, the next level of human evolution. Your powers are a link in the chain."

"None of us have had children — none of us dared. We had no idea what we might produce," Richard pointed out, frustrated by the note of regret that still tinged his voice, so many years after they'd made that decision.

"The development of powers such as yours in *homo sapiens* is the natural precursor to the powers of these children. The fact of those powers made their development inevitable."

"And what's your interest, then? What are you after?"

She smiled. "Time. I'm after Time."

"Time for what?"

"Not time for anything, but Time itself. There are ... entities ... which would divert the flow of Time. Divert the flow of Time, and Time becomes unstable. Time breaks through, scrambles reality. These children must become adults, must bring forth the next generation in their development."

"And these agents of Time — they're trying to stop that."

"Yes."

"Well, then, I guess we'll just have to see about that, won't we?" Richard asked, smiling faintly. "Craig, Sharron?"

"You really think we can trust her, Richard?" Craig inquired, his mental voice tinged with suspicion.

"I don't know, Richard — why haven't we felt some of these children?" Sharron interjected.

"My friends have reservations," Richard said out loud. "Why have we remained unaware of these telepathic children?"

"Why has the world remained unaware of you? Survival instinct. But haven't you felt the ones who haven't made it? Haven't you felt moments of brilliant pain? Haven't there been times when your mind felt as though it would explode?"

Richard's eyes widened. There had been times as she'd described, a few in the years after their transformation, but an increasing numbers since. In increasing frequency. He hadn't dared see a physician over them, for fear the doctor might notice the other strange differences between his body and mind and that of a normal human's. He, like Sharron and Craig, simply weathered what they had come to call "mind storms."

"You have, then. Those moments were the dying cries of children flung to the winds of hyperspace, lost because they couldn't find their own kind before it was too late."

Lines of strain tightened around his eyes, pain at the memory, and now at the knowledge of its cause. "And there are more of them being born every day," Richard added.

"The species is struggling to be born, as I said."

"So, I suppose we're to be midwives."

"Caretakers. Guides. Mentors, if you like."

He glanced at his desk, piled with the detritus of running a major security agency. "Beats paperwork," he observed with a lopsided smile.

Her own smile widened. "Anything beats paperwork." At his upraised eyebrow, she elaborated, "I'm a field agent. A specialist. There's always paperwork."

"Never go into management," he warned with a grin.

"I doubt I'll have the chance. So ... you and your friends?"

"We'll be there," Richard answered, standing and stretching. He reached around to grab his suitjacket, turned back saying, "Now, I don't suppose you'd like to join me —" he noticed she was gone, and he trailed off uncertainly — "for lunch?" He shook his head. "Well, maybe a drink in Washington."

"Richard? Richard, are you there?" Sharron's voice called in his mind.

"Yes, Sharron, I'm here. My visitor has gone. Look, love, I'll see you in Washington, okay?"

"You really think we should take the risk?"

"I think we really have to take the risk, Sharron. Craig — find me a *nice* hotel this time, will you?"

"Yeah, sure. And don't forget to bring me those videotapes you promised," Craig replied with a mental chuckle.

"What tapes? Oh, yes — Sapphire —" he cut himself off, his glance returning to the empty place where she had stood, shook his head, smiling slightly, and resumed — "and Steel. Right. They might surprise you. See you soon." With that, he cut the telepathic connection, straightened his jacket collar, and left his office, closing the door behind him.



She-Wolf of London



Possession Is 9/10 Of The Law

by A. 'Nea
Dodson

The blue light of the leap dissipated, stranding Sam Beckett in a dim, damp room. In his right hand was an old-fashioned ring of keys. In his left hand was a manacle.

In the manacle was a female arm.

Stunned, Sam's gaze travelled up the arm to the face of a young woman who leaned, sweating and panting, against the cold stone wall.

"Hurry, Ian!" she urged him. "Lock me up! Quickly!"

"Oh, boy," moaned Sam. He had leaped into some very bizarre situations since his time-travel experiment had glitched and condemned him to bounce in and out of other people's bodies, but this went right off the weirdness scale. The woman before him was dressed in little more than her underwear, and was chained to the wall at wrist and ankle. Sam had no idea what the person he'd leaped into had been planning, but he was certain that he wouldn't let it happen!

"Ian?" the woman asked as Sam freed her wrist. Her voice rose in horror as he moved to unlock her other arm. "What are you doing? Stop it!"

"No," Sam told her stubbornly. "I'm letting you go."

"Are you crazy? The moon's rising! The full moon!" Her shriek rose to a scream as she convulsed against the remaining restraints.

Worried, Sam hurried to unlock the leg manacles. She needed medical attention! But as he bent down she recovered and clubbed him on the back of the neck. The blow wasn't very strong but it was unexpected, and Sam dropped the keys. Instantly she grabbed them and began awkwardly chaining herself back up.

"You can't let me loose!" she gasped. "I am about to turn into a werewolf!" She resecured one wrist, but fumbled as she clumsily tried to manipulate the other lock one-handedly.

Sam snatched the keys back. "There are no such things as werewolves!" he said with authority, bending warily to unlock her ankles. He kept his eyes on her free hand, waiting for another punch, and therefore never saw the kick coming. He was knocked back against something that rattled; glancing over his shoulder he saw iron bars before he looked back at his adversary. Once again he had dropped the keys, and they both scrambled for them. She won.

"You *know* there are such things!" she shouted at him. She relocked an arm up, just in time to cling to the chain for support as another convulsion hit. Concerned, Sam reached for her, but she pushed him away. "Ian, if you're not going to help, then leave me alone. Go away! Please!"

Sam grabbed again for the keys, then stopped before he used them. Something about her face, as she turned to plead with him made him pause. Perhaps it was just the odd lighting here, but her eyes suddenly looked ... yellow. And didn't she have more tangled auburn hair than she did a moment ago?

She threw back her head and screamed, then looked at him one last time. "Go!" she howled — literally. Her voice trailed off into a wolf-like bay, and Sam watched in uncomprehending shock as the lines of her face shifted and rearranged themselves. Suddenly a six-foot wolf snarled in his face and Sam, not even thinking about his actions, bolted backward.

The iron bars he'd bounced off earlier were a cage door; Sam paused in his flight just long enough to slam it shut as the thing in the cell snarled and lunged at him. The creature was brought short by the remaining chains and it howled in frustration. Sam broke and ran.

There was a doorway behind him; Sam bolted through it like an Olympic sprinter. He got a dim impression of a room full of tools and dusty boxes that he blindly avoided at top speed, before he was stopped by a triple-locked metal door. Sam tugged on the center deadbolt, but he couldn't even rattle the heavy door in its frame. He searched his pockets with shaking hands for the

keyring, but he must have dropped it in his flight; it was nowhere to be found, and he didn't dare go back into the other room to search for it. He slid helplessly down the door and sat on the ground, waiting for the thing in the cage to break free and kill him.

"Sam!" The voice, coming unexpectedly out of the dark beside him, almost gave him a cardiac arrest. But this voice was familiar, as was the face of the man who casually stepped through the metal door.

As Sam travelled through time his sole contact with home and sanity was his best friend, Al. Physically, Al stayed in the future, at the project H.Q. But using their advanced technology, Al could appear to Sam as a hologram and give him advice from the project controlling computer Ziggy. Not that anything could be said to be controlling Project Quantum Leap anymore, unless it was capricious fate or divine whim, for Sam found himself dumped into situation after situation where his only escape was to find and correct mistakes made in the past.

"Hey, Sam, get this," the stocky, overdressed hologram chortled. "The guy back in the Waiting Room says we gotta get him back before his girlfriend turns into a werewolf! Ain't that a kick in the butt?"

"Ngh," Sam grunted, too wrung out to react.

Al frowned and looked closer. "Are you okay?"

"Umm ..." A furious snarl from the next room interrupted Sam's attempt to think of a reply.

"What the heck is that?" Al shouted.

"Would you believe it's the girlfriend? She's your type, Al — a real animal."

Al gave him a don't-yank-my-chain look, then stuck his face through the wall for a peek. Ferocious baying greeted him. Al almost broke the record for the standing broad jump — backward. "Sam, there's some kind of monster in there! Get out of here! *Get out of here!*"

"I can't! I lost the keys to the door!" Sam shouted back. "Quick, tell me what I'm here to do, and maybe I can do it and leap out of here."

"Good idea," Al pulled out his pocket link to Ziggy. "Okay, it's October 4, 1990. Your name is Ian Matheson, and you're a mythology professor at a small university just outside London, England. You live in the boarding house that your parents run, along with your aunt and your nephew. The only boarder is a student at your university named Randi Wallace. She's a myth ..." Al stopped, frowned at the link, and shook it vigorously, "... ology major in her first year of grad studies."

Sam closed his eyes. "You may have been right the first time. Al, when I first leaped in here, there was a woman in that cage."

Al was horrified. "And you left her there with that thing?"

"No, she turned into 'that thing' right in front of me."

Al squinted suspiciously at Sam. "Did you hit your head on anything? How many fingers am I holding up?"

"Two. Plus your usual cigar between them. Al, I swear, I'm not kidding and I didn't hit my head. I leaped in just as this Ian Matheson had chained up some young woman. She looked about the right age for a grad student. When I tried to unlock her she freaked out — and then she turned into ... that. I lost my head and ran out here, but I can't get past the door without the keys and I dropped them. If I'm here to make sure that Matheson isn't mauled by a wild dog, then I'm too late."

Al punched frantically at his computer link. "Hang on, Ziggy's trying to get a fix ... here it is." He grimaced. "The good news is, you don't get mauled. Ziggy says there's a 98% chance that you're here to save Randi."

A howl came from the other room and both men flinched. "If that's Randi, then I think she can take care of herself," Sam said quietly.

"No, she can't," Al contradicted. "The bad news is that four days from now she commits suicide. The Mathesons find her in her bed, overdosed on sleeping pills."

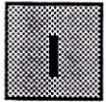
"Could it have been an accident?"

Al hit more keys. "No way. She'd swallowed about three dozen pills and washed them down with a bottle of Ian's brandy."

"Why?"

The werewolf snarled.

"You mean beside the obvious reason?" Al asked, taking a long drag on his cigar. "Ziggy doesn't have that data yet."



It was a long, slow night. Sam wanted Al to go back and find out more from the real Ian Matheson, who was stranded in the Waiting Room, but Al refused to leave him alone in the basement with the monster. Once he offered to go look for the keys, but the werewolf tried to attack and Al didn't stick around to see if it could harm a hologram.

Toward dawn the creature became less restless, and the other room grew quiet. Finally, as the sun's first light filtered through the dingy window set high in the wall, a soft voice called "Ian? Are you there?"

The two men stared at each other for a moment. Then Al stood up, gesturing for Sam to wait, and walked through the wall to the next room. There was a pause, then he yelled joyfully, "Hey Sam! There's a girl in here – and she's *nude!*" His head popped back through the wall. "And she's got great ..."

"Go back to the project and talk to the guy in the Waiting Room," Sam ordered tiredly, cutting Al off in mid-letch.

"You're no fun," Al complained, punching the buttons that would open his door to Project. It *shooed* open, and Al stepped through to the future as Sam stepped through the door to the other room.

Neither one noticed the shadow that fell briefly against the basement window, then was gone.

Once again a young woman waited in the cell. She looked exhausted and dirty, but she smiled weakly at Sam. "Well, so much for 'that time of the month'."

"Are you all right?" Sam asked tentatively.

She nodded, then shrugged. "All right for a werewolf, I guess." She smiled again briefly, and he realized that under the dirt and sweat she was really rather pretty. Her face was shield-shaped, with a delicately pointed chin, and her eyes were large and dark in the morning light. But there were tears in those eyes and she sniffed as she demanded "What the hell got into you last night? I could have hurt you – I could have killed you!"

"I guess I lost my head for a moment," Sam replied, opting for the truth. He found the keyring glinting in the morning light and unlocked the cell door.

"You scared me," she said in a muffled voice, presenting her cuffed wrists to him. "I thought I'd change while you were still in the cage. I thought I'd hurt you when I was ... Oh, Ian, you're the only reason I can bear this curse. You make me feel like we'll really find a cure someday. If something happened to you I'd kill myself, I would."

"Don't talk like that!" Sam snapped, louder than he meant. "Nothing is worth suicide!"

Randi winced. "You're not the one who has to be locked up every month!" Sam opened his mouth to reply, but she held up a hand. "Look, it's been a hard night, and let's not argue about this. I'm okay, you're okay, nothing horrible happened to either of us, end of discussion." She reached past Sam and picked up a bathrobe that had been neatly folded and left on the floor by the cage. "Besides, if we don't get up there pronto, we'll miss breakfast and we'll both be late for class."

Sam followed her tamely out of the basement and up to an upper landing, where they met two other members of the Matheson family – a sandy-haired, pudgy boy of 12 or 13 and a heavily made-up matron – coming down.

"Did you have a good ... experiment last night?" asked the boy with a revoltingly knowing leer.

"Julian," Randi said sternly, "we have been doing experiments with poltergeist activity, and it is hard work."

"So that's what you young people are calling it nowadays," sniffed the older woman archly.

"Funny how those poltergeists always manage to get your clothes off," Julian added. He ducked Randi's grab in his direction and scampered down the stairs.

"Such a fuss," the elderly woman said. "You'd think that you two were hiding some dark horrible secret, not getting up to a little normal hanky-panky." She shook her head and continued on down serenely.

Sam felt himself blushing to the roots of his hair.

Randi just smiled and shook her head. "Look, you go change and get breakfast. I'm going to take a quick shower if Aunt Elsa and Julian have left me enough hot water."

Sam found "his" room without much trouble and took a look at "himself" in the mirror. Ian was in his late thirties, with angular features, thick brown hair, and slate blue eyes. He was a slender man of medium height, and seemed to be in pretty good physical shape. Sam's curiosity about his latest appearance appeased, he found a change of clothes and followed the sound of muted uproar to the dining room.

Elsa and Julian were already seated at the table. Elsa was arguing with a balding, stocky older man who was serving kippers from the head of the table. A chubby woman at the other end was serving up tea and a running commentary to Julian about the importance of eating all his porridge. A small parakeet occasionally shrieked, adding to the noise level. Sam sat down and was promptly handed fish and tea.

He was still picking bones out of the kipper when Randi arrived, this time clad in a leather miniskirt and man's shirt, and bestowed a sunny smile on all at the table. Long earrings swung from her earlobes, severe glasses covered her eyes, and her hair was tied neatly back. She looked like a perfectly normal student with a certain New Wave fashion flare, and not at all like someone who had been a raging beast not two hours before. The smile picked up a little extra voltage when she aimed it at Sam, but all she said was a general "Good morning!" as she dropped into her seat.

"How can you call it a good morning when it starts with a whole fish?" a familiar voice asked rhetorically. Al waded through the table (avoiding

the kippers) coming to stand beside Sam. "How are you doing?"

"I'm fine, thanks," Randi said, smiling at Sam, who blinked at her.

"Excuse me?" he finally blurted.

She grimaced. "Sorry. I thought you said something." She shifted her glance away from him in embarrassment — and ended up looking straight at Al. Al jumped away the moment he noticed, and seemed to take courage in the fact that she didn't turn her head to track him. He leaned forward and waved a hand in front of her face. She blinked, but that was her only reaction.

"Is something wrong?" Sam asked, hoping to bring her attention back to the people who were really in the room. Most people couldn't see or hear his holographic companion, but, on the other hand, animals were usually sensitive to his presence ...

Randi gave her head a tiny shake and smiled at Sam. "Nah. I thought I heard something, but I guess not." She looked puzzled for a second more. "Do you smell cigar smoke?"

"That does it, I'm outta here," Al announced. "I'll come back when you get rid of Miss Mutual-of-Omaha's-Wild-Kingdom there. This leap's too strange for me." With a stab at the handlink the hologram disappeared.

Randi had been to a student party the night before the full moon, and took the walk to the university as an opportunity to catch "Ian" up on all the news. Sam listened to her excited chatter with only half an ear, glad that her enthusiasm prevented her from noticing that he was following her blindly. Fortunately for him, she headed for his office first.

The office had the same antique feel as the rest of the university; like a medieval monastery adapted for use by academics. The office was lined with books upon books in heavy wooden shelves and lighted with an ancient stained glass window. Sam rummaged among the untidy heaps of papers, notes, and texts on the desk, hoping to find a class schedule or lecture outline.

"Lose your notes for today's lecture?"

"What?" Sam was distracted from her question by the sight of a piece of notepaper rolled into a battered manual typewriter on the desk. He'd almost passed it by, but then the words registered, and he pulled it out for a closer look.

"Randi, come here and take a look at this. Did you type this?"

"Me? On that outdated monstrosity? C'mon, I even had a laptop with me on the moors. I'd never get mugged by a werewolf without the latest technology. No, I ..."

Sam never did find out what she was going to say. She stopped short as she stared at the odd message.

"Peekaboo.
I'll be you."

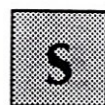
"Weird," was her only comment. Then a bell rang and she jumped. "Hurry, grab your robes and get to class, we're late!"

"Robes?" The rustle of a professor passing the open door in full academic regalia answered that question. Sam glanced frantically around for Ian's cap and gown, finally spotting the gown thrown carelessly into a corner. It took a moment to fight his way into the garment, for Sam hadn't worn regalia since MIT. He grabbed a piece of paper out of a book luridly titled *Satan's Sex Slaves* and brandished it with a flourish.

"Time for a pop quiz," he told her, waving the printed list of questions in her direction.

She scowled and grabbed the list out of his hands. "Ian, we haven't gone over half this stuff! You weren't going to give these lectures until next week!"

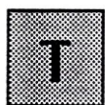
"I was? I mean, of course I was. This isn't the quiz," Sam fumbled, trying to sound authoritative. "It's the list of study questions. Now where was that ..." Leaving the noun unspecified, Sam glanced wildly back at the desk for inspiration. None presented itself. With a shrug, Sam stuffed the list of questions into a pocket of the gown and followed Randi out the door. Luck was with him, though, as the pocket already contained a typed lecture.



Somehow Sam managed to muddle through the next hour. Mythology wasn't his strong suit. He'd always been a practical man, and none of his scientific degrees prepared him to answer questions on the ethnocentricity of the Mephisto fallacy. He dodged having to answer for himself by abruptly asking other students if they knew the information, and relied on his knowledge of human nature to warn him when they were guessing. Apparently Dr. Matheson taught by alternately lecturing and grilling his students, as no one seemed surprised by Sam's approach.

Sam, on the other hand, was pleasantly surprised by Randi. No question stumped her; she was obviously intelligent and she really knew her subject. Regrettably, Sam realized, that made it twice as hard for him to impersonate someone she knew very well, someone she expected to know more than she did. When the bell rang again and she was swept away with the others, he heaved a sigh of relief.

Then he headed back to Ian's office. Once there, he pulled off the robe and reached for the bookshelves. Surely in all those mythological texts there was some information about werewolves!



The material was there, all right, but it took hours for Sam to even find the proper books. Ian used no filing system Sam could figure out, if there was a system at all, and the books themselves were piled at least two deep on each shelf. In the end, eleven books were stacked on the messy desk, and Sam settled down to read until Randi knocked on the office door to ask if he was coming back to the boardinghouse for dinner.

Dinner was served in the same chaos as breakfast, only this time the menu was scrambled eggs, baked beans, and french fries (which Sam remembered in the nick of time to call "chips"). Aunt Elsa and Mr. Matheson buried themselves behind their respective papers; the lurid, sensational *Sun* for Elsa and the staid, respectable *London Times* for Ian's father. Mrs. Matheson chattered about her morning to the front page of the *Times*, and Julian was trying to get somebody — anybody — to listen to a story he had heard at school.

The sound of the telephone cut through the din. For a moment it seemed to Sam that they would all ignore it, but then Mr. Matheson answered it, barking "Matheson B&B, here!" into the receiver. He listened for a second, then gasped "Oh, my God!"

The rest of the family was shocked into silence. They all stared at Mr. Matheson, who was now gripping the receiver so tightly that his knuckles were turning white.

"How long ago?" he asked the phone. There was a buzzing of voices from the other end, their explanation going on for quite a while. Finally Ian's father said softly, "Thank you for telling us. Yes, of course we'll be sure to alert the authorities if he tries to contact us." He set the receiver down with a shaking hand and turned to face his frozen family.

"Nigel's escaped," he said in a stunned voice.

"Dad?" Julian squeaked. "But he's in ja — in America! Why did they call you?"

"The American police say that he escaped sometime yesterday, and that a man matching his description was seen at an airport yesterday morning, their time. They think he may try to come back to England."

Mrs. Matheson stared at her husband with wide eyes and open mouth. "But he was going to be locked up for the rest of ..."

"Sssshhhh!" hissed Aunt Elsa, nodding at Julian, who was staring at his plate and mechanically mashing the last of his fries into oblivion.

"Ian, who's Nigel?" Randi whispered in Sam's ear.

"He's your brother," Al unexpectedly muttered into the other ear.

Sam stifled his startled jump and obediently repeated "He's my brother, and he ..." He trailed off and raised a meaningful eyebrow at Al.

"He's trouble, that's what he is. Sam, we have to talk," the hologram warned.

Mrs. Matheson leaned over and patted Sam's hand. "I'm afraid that Nigel was a disappointment

to the family," she told Randi. "Not a nice boy like Ian at all."

Randi frowned. "Is Nigel your evil twin, Ian? You've never mentioned his name before."

"Yes," Sam said, looking to Al for confirmation.

Al nodded. "A pretty good way of putting it. Ian and Nigel were identical twins, but while Ian is a model citizen — aside from his habit of locking pretty girls up in the basement every month — this Nigel nozzle has a rap sheet as long as my arm."

"He didn't do it, you know," Julian quietly announced to his plate, still crushing the last flattened remains of his meal. "He may not have been a very nice guy, but he didn't ..."

"Of course not, dear," Mrs. Matheson hastened to assure him. "None of us thinks he could have."

"Some of us do," Aunt Elsa scoffed automatically. Julian turned white and Elsa hastened to add "not that he did, of course, just that he mi ... Of course, I don't think he actually —" She had to raise her voice in hopes that Julian might hear as he rushed out of the room. Everyone remaining glared at her.

Everyone except Randi. "Just what was Nigel arrested for, anyway?"

"Murder one," Al said grimly into the silence after the slam of the front door.

Randi gulped.

"You don't want to know," Sam told her. He folded his napkin and threw it down. "I'd better go see where Julian got to."

"I'll come with you," Randi volunteered instantly, jumping up.

"Ummm," Sam stalled, looking at Al. How could he explain that what he really needed to do was talk to his contact from the future? Not even a werewolf would believe that.

"Better stick with her until we know more about this leap," Al advised. He checked the handlink. "Ziggy says the kid's gone to the local church. He's got a friend there."

"Is there some problem?" Randi asked.

"No! Of course not. I was, uh, just trying to figure out where Julian might have gone to. The church, I think."

"That'll be the day," scoffed Mr. Matheson. "When that little delinquent gets religion ..."

"Now, dear," his wife corrected, "he does seem quite taken with the minister's daughter."

"Such a pretty little thing," Elsa said approvingly.

"That's enough out of you!" Mr. Matheson snapped. "Wouldn't have to go find him if you'd kept your cake-hole shut, would they now?"

Randi, Sam, (and Al) fled the room as, behind them, the battle began in earnest.

"Uh, oh, Sam, it's getting dark out," Al warned as they stepped outside.

Sam looked warily at the sky. "Er, Randi, maybe I'd better go alone."

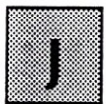
"Why?" She followed his gaze upwards. "Gonna be a nice night. I used to like moonlit nights." She sighed.

"Are you going to be all right?"

"Is the moon full?"

"Not anymore."

"Then I'll be fine."



Julian was recovered from the Rectory, Randi remained human (and unsuicidal) and the rest of the night passed without incident. Things seemed to be calming down, at least until Sam headed for the university next morning.

"Hullo again, Ian," a professor cheerfully greeted him as he passed in the hall on the way to his office. "Forget something, have you?"

"No," Sam stammered, trying not to make it sound like a question. "Why?"

"Well, I just saw you leaving your office, so I figured you must be going back for something."

"I forgot my, uh ... my robes. Can't teach without your robes, can you?" Sam smiled disarmingly and gestured at the other teacher's attire, his mind racing.

The other professor frowned. "Thought you were carrying 'em before. Ah, well, m'eyes aren't what they used to be. About time I asked the National Health for a pair of glasses."

"Er, right," Sam said, beating a hasty retreat. The moment he was out of sight, the retreat became open flight, and he ran the rest of the way.

If the office had looked messy before, now it looked like a candidate for disaster relief. The bookshelves had been emptied, and their contents scattered all over. Papers were tossed everywhere, and the books *Satan's Sex Slaves* and *The Face of Fear* had been literally ripped to pieces. Sam scraped the torn pages and broken covers into the wastebasket, only then noticing to his surprise that the author for both books was Ian Matheson.

"Give somebody a bad grade yesterday?" Al asked as he appeared, surveying the damage and puffing his cigar.

"No." Sam started to put the room to rights as best he could. "Please tell me you have more information on Nigel."

"You don't think he did this, do you? If he got out of America at all, he probably headed for the first tiny place with no extradition law."

"What did he do that had Julian so upset?"

"Nigel married an American to keep from being deported as an undesirable alien. They had Julian. Two years ago she disappeared. Circumstantial evidence led to Nigel being arrested for her murder."

"And the Mathesons adopted Julian? What about her parents?"

"Both dead. In fact, her father had just died and left her a small fortune just a few months before she disappeared. The money was never found."

Sam sighed heavily. "Poor kid. But I still think Nigel's here. Look, a Professor just saw 'me' twice. And there was a threatening note in the typewriter yesterday."

"What note? Show me!"

"I can't. It's gone." Sam wasn't surprised that the note was gone; why should the culprit come back and leave incriminating evidence behind? But other things were missing as well. Ian's robe was nowhere to be found, nor were the books Sam had pulled aside the day before.

"Al, he took the books on lycanthropy."

"Lyco-what?"

"Werewolves!" Sam translated. "Nigel took the books I was reading on werewolves! He knows about Randi!"

"Now wait a minute, Sam. I don't know what happened the other night, but I do know that there are no such things as werewolves!" Al sounded more like he wanted to be reassured than like he was stating a fact.

Sam didn't have time to be reassuring. "Apparently there are. You saw what happened; you just don't want to accept it."

"Don't say that!" Al shouted. "You know this kind of stuff gives me the creeps!"

"I thought you didn't believe in the supernatural."

"What's the point in getting the creeps if you don't believe?"

Sam thought about that for a second, then let it pass. "Have Ziggy get all the data available on Nigel. I tell you, Nigel is up to something and it has to do with Ian."

Al shook his head over the handlink. "Not according to Ziggy."

"Well, Ziggy's been wrong before."

The budding argument was cut short by a tentative knock on the door. At Sam's invitation the door swung wide, revealing Randi.

"Nice miniskirt," Al breathed. "Oooh, bend over and pick up something, would you?"

Randi wasn't quite so appreciative as she sniffed the air. "There's that cigar smell again. Have you taken up smoking, Ian?"

Al sighed and punched at the link, making the door *shoop* into existence behind him. "Just when I start to get to like her, she reminds me she ain't for real. I'll go get what I can on Nigel."

"I volunteered to come see why you weren't in class," Randi started — then she got a good look at the mess in the office. "What happened? Ian, are you all right?" She lunged into Sam's arms, much to Al's amusement.

"Nice teacher-student relationship going there, I'd say," Al leered, then shut the waiting room door before Sam could reply.

"I'm all right," he told Randi. "I promise." He squeezed once in consolation, then let go. "Go tell the others that class has been cancelled. Then call the police — I mean, the bobbies — and I'll try to straighten things up a bit and see what's missing."

Randi nodded and left, and Sam returned to cleaning the room up as best he could.

Half-way through his task Sam heard the waiting room door *shoop* into existence again. Al stepped through and looked cautiously around him.

"She's getting the police," Sam said, then turned back to put the last book away. "Anything new? What did Ziggy have to say about Nigel?"

"That's what I came to tell you, Sam. They find Nigel on Hampstead Heath tonight."

"Good. Does he go back to jail?"

"Not good, and no, he doesn't. He goes to the morgue. They found his body, Sam. He'd been mauled to death."

The time traveller and the hologram stared at each other for a moment, then said in unison, "Randi."

"But the full moon is over!" Sam protested. "She was fine last night!"

"Tell that to Nigel!" Al yelled back. "She turns him into meatloaf! It must be why she kills herself, Sam. Ian told me that she's never killed a human being while she was a wolf. He's still insisting I tell him how he got sucked into an alternate dimension, but he told me all about her. She's terrified that she'll become a murderer."

"And now she does." Sam thought about the chilling message waiting in Ian's twice-violated office. "I bet she does it in defense of Ian. Somebody's up to something, and I'm sure it's Nigel."

"Who cares why she does it?" Al shouted. "You just have to make sure she doesn't do it, or you're stuck here in the Twilight Zone!"

Before Sam could think of a reply to that Randi had returned, with the police and a University Dean. Al took a look at Randi and raised the link as if he was considering reopening the door, but he changed his mind as the bobby started asking questions. Instead, he kept in the background and fed Sam answers to tell the policeman. Randi stood by the door and stayed completely quiet, not drawing attention to herself and obviously hoping to stay and lend what support she could. But the Dean waved her off to the rest of her classes. She looked at Sam, who nodded his assent. Better that she not witness him stumbling over a list of the contents of his own office!

The statement seemed to go on forever, and both Sam and Al had to guess at what items should be listed as missing. Afterward, Sam was preoccupied as he walked wearily back to the Matheson boarding home, trying to think his way through the current problem. According to the books, Randi should only turn into a wolf the night of the full moon – one night a month. But according to Al, tonight she would change again, this time killing Nigel. Still lost in thought, he walked into the house and almost collided with Ian's mother.

"Oh, you're home again?" she greeted him with a broad smile. "I'll have your robe ready in a couple of ticks. Such a tear you got in it this morning!"

That got Sam's attention. "This morning?"

She bustled by unconcernedly. "Yes, just before tea. You came home with your robe and your pants all ripped up from that spill you took on the pavement. And I said I'd stitch it up while you changed and you said not to bother right away because you'd just come home to change. You remember, dear." And off she went upstairs, humming to herself.

"And then you found that you'd left your billfold behind in your office and had to borrow a couple

quid from me to get back," grumbled Ian's father, passing through the hall. "Don't know what's gotten into you today, Ian. Acting like an idiot, you are."

"I didn't ..." Sam began.

"Who else? You think Nigel would come back just to take your robes?"

"Frankly, yes."

"You've been working too hard, that's what you have," Mr. Matheson shouted from the next room, where he'd begun to feed the bird. "What would he want with your robes? Besides, he probably never made it out of the States. I can't believe he'd come back here."

"But ..." Sam gave up. If Ian and Nigel's parents couldn't tell the difference between the twins, how could he convince them otherwise, especially since he himself was impersonating Ian. And he could hardly bring his suspicions up to Randi, either, for the same reason. There seemed to be nothing he could do except wait for Nigel to make his move and try to be ready for it. With that in mind, he went down to check the dungeon. If, for some unforeseen reason, Randi did transform tonight, the cage and chains could be all that made the difference between a murder/suicide and his chances of leaping out.

All seemed normal – as normal as a middle-class basement dungeon cell could be called. Frustrated, Sam climbed the stairs back up, arriving in the living room just in time to hear the end of a conversation between Randi and Elsa, both of whom had just arrived back for dinner.

"Don't worry, Randi," the elderly woman was assuring the student. "I'll see to it that Ian knocks you up in time."

"What?" Sam screeched. "Randi, I hope you don't think ... I mean, I couldn't just..."

"Can't what?" snapped Elsa. "It's too hard to lift your hand and knock on her door to wake her up? How do you expect her to get up in time to join us for an outing on Saturday? Randi, if he's going to back out I hope you'll still come – what are you laughing at, dear?"

"Nothing, really," Randi finally managed to gurgle. "I didn't think you knew that Americanism, Ian."

Sam retreated, feeling the blood rushing to his face. Somehow this family could, in all innocence, make him more embarrassed than Al could with his raciest remembrances. But Randi followed him.

"Did they find out who trashed your office? What did your parents think? Did you tell them?"

"They haven't found whoever it was, and no, I didn't. They have enough to worry about with Julian being so upset."

Randi shivered. "Do you think it has anything to do with Nigel's escape? Could the note have been from him?"

"I don't know. Why would he come here? If he got out of America at all, why come back here where he's also wanted?"

"Or unwanted, as the case may be. I bet it is him, Ian. Be careful!"

"I'm being as careful as I can be," Sam told her honestly.

Dinner that night was a strained affair, with Randi and Sam preoccupied with the Nigel problem and Julian buried in his own misery. Aunt Elsa and Mr. Matheson took the tension out on each other, fighting with more than their usual vigor. In an attempt to lighten the mood, Sam complimented Mrs. Matheson on the taste of the squash, only to be met with blank incomprehension. "Squash?" she quavered. "But we aren't drinking squash. It's sparkling fruit juice."

"Sorry, I, uh, don't know what I was thinking," Sam stumbled uncomfortably, hastily stuffing another mouthful of what he thought was squash into his mouth in lieu of coming up with a reply. Wasn't it Shaw who'd written that America and England were divided by a single language?

"Well, he obviously likes the corgettes," Elsa comforted her sister-in-law. "Is it a new recipe?" The two women distracted each other with cooking hints, while Mr. Matheson and Julian ignored the byplay completely. But Randi looked long and thoughtfully at Sam eating his corgettes

across the table, her silent stare reminding him uncomfortably of a predator assessing its prey.

As soon as decently possible, Sam fled to the basement to try to gather his nerves and hope that Al would show up with more information. Randi was upstairs in her room, doing homework, and he hoped that she'd be all right for a little while without his supervision.

Shoop. Al appeared, a spot of lurid paisley brightness in the dark dungeon. "Any progress?"

"Some progress. I'm convincing them I'm crazy!" Sam complained. "It's a perfectly quiet night, my 'brother' is nowhere to be seen, and Randi's starting to get suspicious about me."

Al glanced at the handlink. "According to Ziggy, nothing's changed. Nigel dies tonight in about three hours, and Randi kills herself tomorrow. You gotta do something, Sam."

"What can I do about her? Lock her up down here to keep her out of the way?"

"It's a start."

"I tried to convince her Nigel hadn't made it out of America, but she isn't convinced. Now what? She seems happy enough — what would make her kill herself?" Sam started pacing, frustrated.

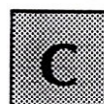
"She turns Nigel into kibbles'n'bits. I'd say that's a pretty good contender."

"Wait. She told me that she'd kill herself if anything happened to Ian. What if something did happen to him? We've seen how easily the twins can switch off. Just because I've taken Ian's place doesn't mean he's safe, does it? Maybe it's Ian that gets killed ..."

Behind him the door creaked, swinging through Al, who screamed, "*Sam! Look out!*"

Sam whirled around, bringing him face-first into the chair that was descending on his head.

Darkness — and Sam — fell.



old. He was cold, and his wrists hurt. His head rang with the noise all around him. Slowly the sounds solidified into

one voice — Al's, alternately shouting and pleading.

"Sam! Sam, wake up! Stop that! No, don't — Sam, hurry up! She's gonna ... no, don't lock that! No, no, no! You're making a big mistake ... Sam, wake up, please! She's going ... no, honey, don't do that, you don't know what you're doing ... Sam!"

Sam shook his head and looked up, trying to focus. The cage — he was inside the cage!

Al stood in front of the door, alternately ordering and begging Randi to stop. He jumped in front of her, waving his arms, but she just walked through him. If he yelled very loudly she'd put her head to one side, as if listening, but then she'd shrug and go on.

Randi grabbed the door to the cage. "No, don't, you can't —" Al implored, trying to pull her hands away. Being a holograph, he couldn't touch her, but she shivered at the contact. Desperately he leaned over and shouted directly into her ear, "*Bad Dog!*"

The bars slid right through him as the door slammed shut. Sam groaned.

"So much for you, Nigel Matheson!" she hissed in triumph. "I thought you were acting stranger than normal lately." She leaned close to the bars, her eyes glittering with rage. "Now tell me — what have you done with Ian?"

"I haven't done anything with Ian!" Sam protested, yanking on the chains. "I *am* Ian!"

"Don't give me that, Nigel!" she snapped. "Ian wouldn't forget his class schedule! Ian wouldn't sneak smokes on cigars! Ian wouldn't know American slang if it bit him — but you've talked like a 'Yank' for days! So I started watching you ... and now I heard you talking to yourself! It was practically a confession! You planned to trade places with him, then kill him! And kill me and make it look like suicide! That's what that note we found was all about, wasn't it?"

"It probably was, but I didn't write it! I'm not Nigel!" Sam shouted. "I'm Ian!"

"All right," she drawled sarcastically. "If you're the real Ian, you can tell me what you called me when I first came to class."

Al frantically keyed the question into his link, then shrugged helplessly at Sam.

"Miss Wallace?" Sam guessed.

"Wrong!" Randi pulled the key from the lock with a vicious twist. "Ian called me a poltergeist because I dropped my books. You're staying right there while I call the cops. And don't bother trying to get loose." Her smile was feral. "You can't get out of that. Trust me, I know."

"You can't let her go!" Al warned. "According to Ziggy she still kills Nigel — the real Nigel — I think — and then herself. If you don't get free, it's a 100% chance they both die!"

"Wait, please, wait!" Sam called desperately as Randi turned to leave.

He was still trying to figure out a way to convince her to let him go when the blue light of the leap gathered around him. *No, no, I haven't done it, please, don't ...* Sam prayed.

The cell turned blue and went away.

The leap was short this time, stranding Sam gasping in a dark place, blinking frantically to adjust his eyes. Everything was either brown or grey, excepting one thing covered with a particularly brilliant paisley.

"Sam?" Al's voice asked tentatively.

With a sigh, Sam looked down at himself. Denim miniskirt, ankle boots, silver studded belt ... he could even feel heavy beaded earrings swinging from his earlobes.

"Oh, boy," he groaned, and looked tentatively at the cage. Ian Matheson was shaking his head to clear it, and Al stood between Sam and Ian, looking from one to the other in confusion.

"Over here," Sam muttered. Al stood there with his mouth hanging open in astonishment, but Ian looked up at the sound of his voice.

"Randi, I had the strangest experience," he started, standing up and trying to step forward. The chains brought him up short, and he stared at them in amazement. "Why have you locked me up? Randi, let me out!"

"Let me rerun the percentages," Al said, coming to his senses and pulling out the handlink. Meanwhile, Ian was going from surprise to panic in about 5 seconds flat.

"Randi, let me loose!" he shouted, rattling the manacles.

"I'm not sure I should," Sam blurted, wondering if Ian might be safer in there. The professor, however, misinterpreted him completely.

"Okay, I shouldn't have given you a demerit for tardiness last week," he pleaded earnestly.

"That's not ..." Sam began, but was interrupted.

"And I'm sorry that I said that your favorite movie would bore a lab rat to death. *Blue Lagoon* is the most wonderful movie ever made, does that make you happy?"

"Er ..."

"And I don't think that your new earrings really look like bronzed bits the butcher threw out. They're lovely, really." He rattled the bars in a frenzy. "*Now will you let me go?*"

"You can't let him go now," Al said calmly, puffing on his cigar. "This is getting too interesting."

Sam glared at him, then pointedly shifted his gaze to the handlink. Al punched a few more buttons, then shrugged. "Still the same. He dies, she dies."

Professor Matheson had quieted down; he waited for Sam to look back at him before asking quietly, "Why did you lock me up?"

"Because your twin brother is after you," Sam told him.

"Nigel? But he's in America ..."

"Not anymore. He's here."

"And locking me in my own cellar is going to keep me safe?" Ian's voice rose with incredulity until it squeaked on the last word.

Sam sighed. "No, I guess not. It seemed like a good idea at the time, though." He pulled the keyring out of Randi's pocket and unlocked his former host. "Look, Nigel's been sending you threatening notes. I think he's going to try to switch places with you ..."

"Then he's going to have to stand in line. Randi, the most amazing thing just happened to me. I think I was swept into another dimension ..."

"I think you hit your head too hard when you locked me up a couple days ago," Sam said uncomfortably. Just then the phone rang upstairs. Saved by the bell!

"Get that call!" Al ordered, looking at his link. "It's Nigel!" Obediently, Sam turned and charged back up the stairs, with an extremely puzzled Ian following behind. Al punched a button and blinked out of existence.

And blinked right back in by the phone. Sam burst out of the stairwell and grabbed the receiver out from under Mr. Matheson's hand. "Sorry," he said, trying to duplicate Randi's stunning smile. "I forgot to tell you that I was expecting a terribly important call."

Mr. Matheson huffed, but softened under the smile. "Well, that's all right, then," he muttered and wandered back into the other room, where he picked up his paper.

"Hello, Matheson boarding house," Sam cooed into the phone.

"May I speak to Ian Matheson, please?" asked a rough voice, familiar despite the attempt at disguise. Sam beckoned Ian over and held the receiver between them so they could both hear.

"Hullo?" Ian asked in an uncanny echo of the voice at the other end. "This is Professor Matheson."

"And this is your loving brother," said the caller, dropping all pretense of deception.

"Ni—!" Ian started, only to be shushed angrily into silence by the other end.

"No names! I don't need Daddy dearest overhearing, or Mum getting suspicious. Look, I'll make this simple and quick. You have something I want. I have something you want. Come meet me tonight and we'll make a trade."

"No!" Sam announced decisively.

"Are you the little girl who's been hanging out with Ian at University? Don't annoy me, girlie. I got some very interesting pictures of you the other night, and you're going to be very cooperative, unless you want to be the starring attraction in the next issue of the *Sun*."

"What sort of pictures?" Ian blurted.

"Pictures of a werewolf, brother mine. And here I thought that you didn't believe that myths were real."

"Go ahead and sell them," Sam said with more bravado than he felt. "No one will believe you. But we're not meeting you, tonight or ever!"

"Frankly, my dear, it doesn't matter if they believe those pictures or not. They'll certainly be willing to believe the early ones I got ... you know, Ian. The ones of you locking up one of your scantily-clad female students? The papers will love it, but I don't think the University board would be quite as amused."

Ian's eyes went wide with horror. "Randi," he whispered urgently, "pictures like that could ruin me — ruin both of us! Where do you want us to meet you?" he asked the phone in a louder voice.

"No!" Sam insisted, but Ian took the phone away.

"The playground at Hampstead Heath. Yes, I'll come. I can be there in an hour." The professor put the phone down, his face white. "Randi, we have to go. If he published pictures like that ..." he shuddered. "You'd be expelled, and I'd be barred. I'd never work again."

"I dunno," Al said from the corner where he'd been standing quietly. "Considering that he's the author of such masterpieces as *Satan's Sex Slaves* and *Ian Stryker: Professor of Danger*, his reputation could probably only improve. Then again, if you don't succeed, he'll never write the Stryker one. Oh — and get this — the world will be taken over by zombies."

"What does he want in return for the negatives?" Sam asked Ian.

Ian shuddered. "My passport, ID, and wallet." He tried an unconvincing smile. "If I tell the police I was mugged while taking a stroll on the Heath, it shouldn't be so bad. He'll get out of the country, but I should get my things back before he ruins my reputation completely."

"Ruins your ..." illumination hit Sam like a two-by-four. "Ian, don't do it! Don't you see what he's up to? If he can convince people he's you — even for a little while — then he can convince people that *you are him!*"

"Oh, my God!" Al slapped a hand to his face. "Sam, you were right; that must be why she commits suicide! She doesn't kill Nigel — *she kills Ian by accident!*"

"That has to be it!" Sam answered.

"You could be right," Ian agreed doubtfully. "But so long as he has those pictures, I don't have much of a choice."

"But you do, Sam! Quick, get downstairs and lock yourself up before she changes! No wolf, no manwich, no problem, you leap, and the cops get Nigel like he says!"

"But I can't let you go alone into danger," Sam said.

"Sam, you're the danger! He can handle his brother alone!"

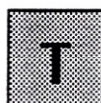
"I can handle him alone!" The professor echoed the hologram.

"I don't think so," Sam told them both.

"Remember what happens when you get ... over-excited, Randi. If you start to change ..."

"I'm still coming with you. It's the only way I can be sure you're safe. Be sure you're ... still you."

"Then come on and get your coat," Ian said. Al just shook his head and groaned.



he ride to the Heath was a silent one. Ian kept stared through the windshield as if he expected it to give him

answers, Sam was racking his brains for a plan, and Al kept casting nervous glances between Sam and the rising moon, not that Sam seemed about to transform into anything. The tiny car wound its leisurely way through the suburbs, until at last Sam could see trees instead of buildings on one side of the road. Ian pulled up on the curb and stepped out, beckoning Sam to follow. Sam held back for a moment, looking at Al, who finally gestured him out.

"Don't worry," he said solemnly. "I'll be with you all the way, Sam, I promise."

The corner of Sam's mouth quirked in a smile and he jumped out to follow Ian.

The professor had already started down one of the park paths, and had almost disappeared in the gloom. Sam and Al scrambled to catch up before he vanished into the shadows completely. Suddenly ahead of them was a rustling of leaves, a startled cry, and the unmistakable thump of a body hitting the ground. Sam broke into a run. Al whipped out his link and shouted "Gooshi, center me on Ian!"

The hologram reappeared just as Sam rounded the corner. Ian lay on the ground, blood pouring from a graze over his temple. Another Ian stooped over him, clutching a rock.

"He tried to jump me from behind that bush," the standing man panted, pointing to some shrubbery beside the path. "But I knocked him out."

Sam hesitated, unsure which was which and highly suspicious. Ian couldn't have knocked Nigel out, it was too easy, and he would have leaped ...

"Come on, Randi," the standing man told him, reaching for his arm. "Let's call the bobbies and ..." he stopped, frowning, when Sam jumped back.

"You're not Ian, you're Nigel!" Sam blurted. The two men before him were dressed almost identically – but Sam had picked Ian's clothes that morning. Ian was the one on the ground, he was sure of it!

"Randi, I'm hurt. Don't you know your own professor? Look, he didn't even get my ID from me." He reached into a pocket and pulled out

Ian's passport and wallet, holding them out for inspection. "Come, look."

Sam took a wary step forward. "You could have taken that out of his pocket just now."

"Come take a look for yourself and see," the man said, moving forward.

"Sam, look out!" Al shouted as Nigel threw the rock. Sam ducked at the last second and the blow only glanced along the top of his head.

"Little bitch!" Nigel snarled, and suddenly pounced, arms swinging. Again Sam ducked, but Nigel was faster, and Sam felt ribs crack under the larger man's fists. Sam twisted free and faced his opponent ...

And suddenly felt rage sweeping through him, an incredible urge to kill and rend and tear ... Sam snarled wordlessly at Nigel, cupping his hands into claws.

"Sam! Sam!" Al's frantic yells distracted him, reminding him of who and what he was. The time traveller shook his head, clearing the red mists from his mind and vision – just in time to see Nigel taking aim with another rock. Sam ducked, and this one missed him completely.

"Don't lose control, Sam!" Al called. "Randi lost the fight when she lost control!"

But Randi is the werewolf, Sam thought, circling Nigel, who jabbed at him with his fists, *and I'm not. I'm going to win this one with strategy, not force!* Nigel feinted left and lunged right, driving straight towards Sam. Sam dodged to one side, grabbed Nigel's arm as he passed, and helped him overbalance – face-first into a tree. Nigel dropped and Al cheered, bouncing up and down in his exuberance.

Sam smiled back at his delighted companion, then started patting Nigel's pockets down for Ian's ID. In one pocket he found a vicious-looking contraption made of three short blades set on a handgrip. He held them up for Al's inspection, which wiped all the good cheer off the older man's face.

"They're called tiger claws," Al said, answering the unspoken question. "I guess that Nigel wanted to make sure that a werewolf got Ian – one way or

another. I wonder why he hates his brother so much."

Sam shuddered. "If he'd knocked Randi out just as she'd started to transform, then killed Ian himself, she'd automatically jump to the conclusion that she was responsible, whether she was or not. And she couldn't tell anyone what happened without confessing to Ian's murder and exposing her curse."

"Well, it doesn't matter now," Al said, consulting his handlink. "According to Ziggy, the park police come by in about 10 minutes and pick all three of you up. Ian proves who he is by the 'identifying marks' part of his passport, Nigel goes back to jail, and Randi gets a reward for his capture."

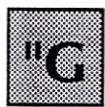
Sam had to ask. "Does she ever get cured?"

Al punched more buttons, then shrugged. "No data. But she and Ian move to L.A. in 1991, and they get married in 1996. And get this — they coauthor a book about the fictional adventures of a modern-day werewolf. It becomes a bestseller and gets turned into a movie, which is a hit ... and now they're talking about making it into a series. They're gonna be fine."

"Good." Sam could feel the energies of the leap building inside him. "Gotta go," he told his friend.

Al smiled, lifted his handlink, and punched a few buttons. "See you soon, Sam."

The world turned blue and vanished.

 oober coming at ten o'clock!" someone howled. Three men dived to the floor as the translucent green goblin plunged at them. The fourth remained standing, with a confused expression that turned to disgust as the ghost smeared slime all over his jumpsuit.

"Ray! Duck and cover, man!" one of the prone men screamed. "The proton streams aren't affecting it!"

Sam dropped with a splat. "Oh, boy ..."

Call for Papers



Ray Vecchio balanced the bulging paper sack on his knee as he tried to negotiate with the recalcitrant mailbox. His bargaining skills were not up to the task of convincing the nondescript postal receptacle to give up the large white envelope wedged inside, and instead, the sack gave up its position, spilling its contents on the ancient mosaic of the lobby floor. In counterpoint to the sound of breaking eggs and sloshing milk, Ray's curses wafted up through the lobby, curled around the aging staircase, and slid down the hallway to the apartment of his friend and owner of the uncooperative contrivance.

Constable Benton Fraser, RCMP, lately attached to the Canadian Embassy in Chicago, Illinois, poked his head out of the never-locked door and shook his head.

Behind him, Diefenbaker whined softly, complaining over the noise and lack of decorum. "I know," replied Fraser over his shoulder. "He's an American. It's part of the national language."

Dief whoofed in response and settled his head back on his paws, seemingly satisfied by the explanation. Fraser, on the other hand, felt compelled to investigate the cause of the disturbance.

He trotted down the staircase and paused on the landing, raising an eyebrow in the direction of his friend. Ray stood in the center of a sea of seeping ooze, a mixture of milk, glutinous eggwhite, and brilliant yellow yolk. He did not look happy as he glared at the offending mailbox.

"Ray, I believe that tampering with the U.S. mail is a federal offense," Fraser observed mildly from his vantage point.

"Yeah, and I believe that jamming mail in a mailbox like it's the purloined letter is a hanging offense," Ray riposted angrily.

"Actually, I don't believe there are any laws concerning the disposition of postal matter in mailboxes," Fraser began as he came down the last few steps. The disparaging look on Ray's face halted the stream of words, and Fraser added, "Ah. I see. Well, let's see about this." He reached into the mailbox, gave a twist of his wrist, and gently extracted the envelopes and circulars that had so defeated his companion.

"I don't believe it," breathed Ray, wide-eyed. "What is it with you?"

"Simple use of a lever, Ray — when force fails, try tipping the balance," Fraser replied soberly. Ray responded with something suspiciously close to a raspberry, which Fraser chose to ignore. "I suppose I should go retrieve some paper towels to clean up this mess ... speaking of which, what *is* this mess?"

"It was going to be dinner. Now I guess you'll just have to spring for Szechuan."

"Ah. I fail to follow your logic, but Szechuan sounds fine to me."

Fraser turned to head back up the stairs, mail in hand, when Ray's hand shot out and grabbed his upper arm. "After all that work, I wanna see what's in that envelope —"

"I believe it's addressed to me, Ray," Fraser started, but when he actually looked at the large white envelope, his eyes widened. "Actually, it's not."

"What, I make an omelette on your lobby floor for somebody else's mail?"

"Well, I suppose it's my mail — it's addressed to my grandparents."

"Your grandparents? Wait a minute, aren't they —"

"Dead. Yes. Several years." Fraser held up the envelope for Ray to see. It had once been flat, but now the edges curled wherever they hadn't been worn away to frayed threads. A succession of addresses were scrawled across the face, including the address of Fraser's father's cabin in Canada, the RCMP headquarters, and finally Fraser's current address.

Ray whistled softly. "Your grandparents knew some heavy-hitters, Benny."

Fraser turned the envelope around and read the return address. The emblem at the upper left-hand corner of the envelope was the crest of the Georgetown Institute. "I take it this is an important place."

"You could say that. GI boasted its very own Nobel-prize winner, Dr. Leonard MacKensie. Even I've heard of it."

"Ah."

"Ah?"

"Yes, 'ah'."

"Well, aren't you going to open it?"

"It is addressed to my grandparents, Ray."

"They're not gonna care. It could be important."

"Actually, your grandmother would like you to open the envelope, Benton," came a voice from the stairway. Fraser stiffened, turned slowly, and glanced up the stairs to see his father — in the ectoplasmic flesh — lounging against the bannister, his arms folded across his chest as he awaited his son's — very definitely still alive — response.

"Ah. I see."

"See what?" Ray demanded.

"You're right, of course, Ray."

"Damn right I'm right. C'mon — let's see!"

Fraser looked back toward his father, and the elder, deceased Fraser shrugged. "Might as well. He's not going to leave you alone until you show him."

"That's true," Fraser agreed absently, and ran his finger under the flap, carefully tearing open the envelope. He blew open the envelope and gingerly extracted a white typewritten piece of paper.

"What's it say?"

"Yes, Benton, what does it say — your grandmother's getting impatient," added Robert Fraser with a hint of exasperation.

Fraser scanned the letter quickly and passed it on to Ray. "It's an invitation to my grandmother to a paranormal conference in Washington, D.C."

"Paranormal conference? You been holding out on me, Fraser? I always figured there was something strange about you."

"Well, not me, actually. But my grandmother was one of the world's leading experts on certain Inuit traditions."

"Admit it, Benton — your grandmother was into ghosts and goblins. Scared the bejesus out of me more than once, too, with her stories." Fraser, Sr. glanced guiltily toward a plane his son could not see. "Oh, no, here she comes."

"Ah, yes," Benton agreed, his own eyes shifting toward where his father looked apprehensively. Unlike his father, he could not see the small, imperious woman in wire-rimmed glasses stomping down the stairs toward his father. Then again, Ray couldn't see his father. "She was quite the authority on Inuit tales of ghosts and the supernatural."

"Ghosts and goblins and things that go bump in the night?" Ray challenged.

"She was a librarian, after all, Ray. And tales of the supernatural permeate the world's literature. There are some excellent examples —"

"Save it, Benny. I'm hungry. Let's clean up this mess, and you can tell me ghost stories over the Scorpion bowl, okay?"

"All right. I suppose I should call this Dr. Moorhouse and inform her that my grandmother won't be attending ..."

"You do that, Benny. Now where's the paper towels?" Vechhio demanded, guiding his friend up the stairs.

After Fraser and Ray had ascended the stairs, Robert Fraser looked at his mother. "I suppose you want me to tell him to go in your place." Grandma Fraser simply smiled, patting her son's red-clad arm. "Ah."

Due South (DS)

(CTV/CBS)

Constable Benton Fraser, RCMP	Paul Gross
Detective Ray Vecchio	David Marciano
Sergeant Robert Fraser, RCMP, Deceased	Gordon Pinsent
Lieutenant Harding Welsh	Beau Starr
Elaine Besbriss	Catherine Bruhier
Detective Jack Huey	Tony Craig
Detective Louis Gardino	Daniel Kash
Diefenbaker	Lincoln

Premise:

After his father's death under suspicious circumstances, Constable Benton Fraser was the last of his kind – a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman of the old order, courteous, loyal to an extreme, and honest beyond belief. No one in the RCMP agreed with him that his father, Sergeant Robert Fraser, had been murdered, but Fraser felt he knew that he had been. Accompanied by his deaf wolf, Diefenbaker, he tracked the killer to Chicago, Illinois, and there teamed up with homicide detective Ray Vecchio. Together, they unearthed a conspiracy within the RCMP to push forward a dam project that would disrupt the ecological balance of an area in northern Canada. Although he brought to light a criminal conspiracy, Fraser was shunned by his fellow RCMP officers, and banished to the wilds of Chicago, to serve at the Canadian Embassy there. His partnership with Vecchio didn't end with their first case. The streetwise cop, the deaf wolf with a mind of his own, and the polite and honest Mountie continued to solve crimes and bring courtesy to the streets of Chicago, aided – after a fashion – by Fraser's deceased father.

First Season Episodes (in order by CBS airdate):

Due South – The Movie	A Cop, A Mountie and	The Wild Bunch
Free Willie	a Baby	The Blue Line
Diefenbaker's Day Off	Gift of the Wheelman	The Deal
They Eat Horses, Don't They?	You Must Remember This	An Invitation to Romance
Pizzas and Promises	Hawk and a Handsaw	Heaven and Earth
Chinatown	Eye for an Eye	Victoria's Secret
Chicago Holiday – Part 1	The Man Who Knew Too	Letting Go
Chicago Holiday – Part 2	Little	

Note: The second season of *Due South* premiered on CTV in November, and rumor has it that it will return as a mid-season replacement on CBS soon.

THE REAL
GHOSTBUSTERS

Cult Buy Me Love

by Liz A. Vogel

The phone jangled abruptly. Janine answered it with her usual, "Ghostbusters. You scare 'em, we snare 'em," ignoring the low moan the noise elicited from the floor above. Ray had made it as far as the couch this morning, where he was ensconced with three blankets, a box of Kleenex, and enough cold medicine to stock a drug store. From the sound of that moan, it wasn't helping much.

"Yeah?" Janine dragged her attention back to the receiver. "Really." The voice on the other end raged on. "Something weird in Central Park? How can you tell?" The voice got louder. "Okay, okay! They'll be right there." She hung up. "Jeeze! Some people are so excitable!" She started to reach for the alarm, then, in deference to Ray's aching head, she marched upstairs to tell the guys they had a job.

Peter looked in on Ray briefly on the way down. "How's it going?" he asked from the doorway. The doctor had assured them that Ray was suffering from nothing more than the latest variety of influenza, but that didn't mean that any of his coworkers wanted to try it for themselves.

"Lousy," groaned the normally chipper Ghostbuster. "I heard the phone; you guys need me to come along?"

Peter shook his head. "I think the three of us can handle it. Besides, there's enough slime in this job without filling Ecto with your used Kleenex," he teased. Ray's mouth twitched slightly, which was the most response any of Venkman's jokes had gotten in two days. "See ya later."

The three healthy Ghostbusters piled into their converted hearse and headed for the park. It was warm enough to forgo winter coats, for which Peter was grateful as he squirmed into the harness of his proton pack. Egon pulled out his trusty PKE meter, did a general sweep of the area, then doublechecked that the machine was turned on.

"Watcha got?" asked Peter, eager to get it over with.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" Winston repeated.

"Nothing," Egon confirmed. "What was the precise description of the disturbance?"

"A bunch of weird guys in robes, dancing around and shooting off sparks," quoted Peter. "Sounds more like a job for the fire department, if you ask me."

Egon pulled two spare meters from the car, and carefully adjusted them to their lowest settings before passing them out to his companions. "We'd better do a sweep of the area, just to make sure. I've set these to pick up even the most minimal energy levels. If you detect *anything*, call."

Peter sighed as he accepted the device. "We're not getting paid for this, are we?"

"C'mon, Pete," Winston responded, "it's probably the last nice day we're gonna get this fall. Think of it as an excuse to get some fresh air."

"I hate fresh air," Venkman grumbled as the three split up to begin their search.

Peter was more than halfway across the park when he spotted what must be their quarry. The two individuals weren't sparking or dancing, but both were clad in long brown robes, complete with face-hiding hoods. "Whoever called us must have been drunk," Peter mumbled to himself, for the two were doing nothing more threatening than looking at a few rustling bushes. Staring rather fixedly, actually, until their concentration was broken by the arrival of a third robed figure. Peter quickly ducked behind a stand of trees.

"Have you found anything?" the new arrival asked. The voice was low and pleasant, vaguely melodic, but serious.

The pair shook their heads. One shrugged, saying, "Nothing worth bothering with."

The lone figure sighed mightily. "This," the voice declared, "is not good."

Belatedly, Peter remembered the PKE meter, and aimed the little device at the group below. The meter blipped softly, responding to a meager residue of energy. "At least it's *something*," Peter said under his breath, then pulled out his walkie-talkie. "Dangermouse to Colonel K. Come in, Colonel K."

"Peter?" Egon sighed. It was always dangerous to leave Venkman alone with the cable remote. "Have you found something?"

"Three rejects from a National Geographic special on tree-worshippers. Other than that, *nada*."

"Don't knock it, man, it's more than I've seen," Winston's voice crackled from the little speaker.

"Do they register on the meter?" inquired Egon.

"Barely. Looks like they might have been up to something a few hours ago, but not now." Peter's yawn was only partially feigned.

"We'll rendezvous with you in a few minutes. Winston ..."

Peter tuned out the rest of the exchange. The three Druid wannabes were conferring quietly; he couldn't quite make out the words.

By the time the others arrived, Peter was cold and stiff enough to want to bust some heads. Egon restrained him. "I think we need more data before we go rushing in," he warned softly. His PKE meter bleeped gently as he aimed it toward the group.

Although the first two weirdos had been oblivious to Peter when he'd discovered them, the newer arrival turned immediately at the sound of Egon's meter. Crepuscular eyes looked directly at them, despite the shrubbery that should have blocked them from view. "My friends," the deep voice alerted its followers, "it seems we have company."

It looked like Peter would get his way after all. The three Ghostbusters stood, and Peter stepped forward. "Okay, pal," he said, "you've had your fun, and I can see you put a lot of work into the costumes, but you're frightening the tourists. How about you pack up the show and go home now?"

"No," the leader replied in a voice like sepulchral honey, "I don't think so." The PKE meters barely

had a chance to go crazy as the robe-framed hands lifted, and suddenly purple sparks coiled around the fingers and shot out at the surprised interlopers.

"Shit!" chorused Peter and Winston, postponing their mad dash for cover only long enough to grab Egon and drag him along. The blond scientist was trying frantically to readjust his PKE meter and take some accurate readings before the little device shorted out completely. After a few feet, Peter screeched to a halt, turned and whipped out his proton thrower. The stream met another batch of purple sparks in midair, but instead of dissipating, the strange energy wrapped itself around the charged protons, coiling and swirling, then grew brighter and started to slide up the beam toward its source. Venkman yelped as he quickly switched off, and decided they'd had the right idea in the first place. As they dashed through the park, they spotted more robed figures, always lurking on the edge of their vision, as though monitoring their progress. None attempted to follow them, however, and by the time they made it to the car, the gasping Ghostbusters were willing to believe they'd eluded any pursuit.

Egon was staring at his meter, which was still emitting little wisps of smoke. "That was incredible. I've never seen power levels increase that rapidly. Do you realize what this means?"

"Let me guess: We *don't* get to go home now, do we?"

"This is bad, isn't it?"

"No, we don't, and yes, it is," responded Egon, still tinkering with the remains of the PKE meter. "That kind of power indicates serious supernatural backing. Those people didn't register on your meter," he glanced at Peter, who confirmed with a nod, "so we know it's not innate to them. The robes are consistent with some sort of cult, and if they're throwing that kind of energy around, presumably they intend to summon up whatever entity they worship." The meter sparked quietly, and Egon stopped fiddling with it. "Judging from these readings, if they're successful; I estimate we'll be facing an entity of Class Seven or higher."

"So much for fresh air and sunshine," remarked Peter. "Let's go blast these turkeys."

"It may not be that simple," Egon returned. "Those energy blasts seemed to be unaffected by our proton streams. Our best chance would be to interrupt the summoning, and even so I'll need to adjust the frequency of our beams. It would also be a good idea if we had four throwers."

"Are you sure about that, man? Ray looked pretty lousy last time I saw him," Winston warned.

"Actually, I was thinking of Janine," countered Egon.

Janine had appropriated one of Peter's jumpsuits, and after rolling up cuffs, tucking and folding wherever possible, had achieved a fashion statement that could only be expressed as "too large." The baggy uniform even hid whether the wearer was male or female, especially with the battered Mets cap that Janine had added to the ensemble. (She'd heard the guys griping more than once about how hard it was to get ectoplasm out of their hair.)

As the pink Volkswagen rolled up and Janine climbed out, trying not to get snagged on anything, Peter grinned. "Nice togs, Janine. Very stylish." Then he looked closer. "Hey, wait a minute. Isn't that my —"

"You want help, or don't you?" the twangy Brooklyn accent challenged, and Peter shut up. Janine smiled sweetly at him, then hauled the spare proton pack out of the trunk. Ever the gentleman, Egon stepped over and took some of the pack's weight while she slipped into the harness. The smile that earned him was considerably nicer. "I brought you a spare," she told him, handing over one of their backup PKE meters.

"Thank you," Egon said absently, already poking at its circuits.

"So, when do we get to kick some ectoplasm?" Janine sounded frighteningly like Peter when she was being enthusiastic.

"Very soon," pronounced Egon, snapping the meter back together with a decisive click. "I'll need to get a few more readings from the one who seems to be in charge, and then fine-tune the throwers. Then we wait for the entity to appear."

"Sounds too easy," remarked Winston.

"It will require extremely precise timing," Egon conceded. "If my calculations are correct," and everyone knew they were, or he wouldn't be mentioning them, "we will have a window of approximately seven seconds, during which we can either contain the entity, or, more likely, drive it back to its original dimensional plane. If we miss that window ..." he trailed off, shaking his head.

"C'mon, Egon," Peter protested, "don't hold back on the *good* news."

"At best, we'll have a very annoyed demigod in the middle of Central Park."

"How nice," drawled Peter. "I'd ask what 'at worst' could be, but I'll just bet I don't want to know, do I?"

"Probably not," his friend agreed.

"Then we better make sure we don't find out," asserted Winston. "Let's get going."

They marched back in the direction from which three of them had so recently come, albeit a little slower this time. None of them glanced back, so they didn't see the gleam in the eyes that watched from behind a convenient tree, or the delighted smile that appeared within a dirty brown hood.

Egon took his readings from the top of a slight rise, near where he and his friends had originally been spotted.

They stayed low to the ground, for there were now quite a few cultists collected in the clearing. The Ghostbusters watched as the strange group formed into a rough circle, beginning a swaying, stomping dance that made several of the watchers dizzy, until Egon signalled that he was finished and they all slid down out of sight.

Egon blinked, adjusted his glasses, and stared at the meter again. "Weird," he muttered.

"What's weird?" asked Peter. "Other than the obvious, that is." He gestured back over the hill.

"These readings are very peculiar." Egon offered the meter to his companions, but the little squiggles often looked peculiar to them anyway. He checked briefly with the pocket version of *Tobin's*, but shook his head. "Not enough data."

"Can you tell how to adjust the packs?" was Winston's concern.

"Of course." Egon removed his own long enough to shift a few wires and turn a dial or two, then slipped it back on. One by one the others turned their backs to him so that he could perform the same trick on their machines.

"Now what?" Janine prompted as he finished.

"Now we wait for the summoning to begin." Egon closed the last panel and sat back, shifting smoothly into Lecture Mode. "Once we determine the focal point of the pattern of the cult's ritual, I will be able to calculate the optimum point from which to fire our proton packs. We'll need to remain close together, to maximize the force along the opposing vector. If we —"

"Uh, Egon," Peter interrupted, "maybe you should save 'Science Made Simple' for later." The note of warning in his voice made Egon look up from his impending lecture to Janine on the joys of geometry and Newtonian physics.

Their old friend with the robe fetish was back. The tall figure stood calmly, hands tucked into the opposite sleeves like a monk in an old movie. An obsidian gaze inspected each of them briefly, but intently. "Back so soon?" came the lilting inquiry. The voice reminded Peter simultaneously of Darth Vader and Mister Rogers; it was very disconcerting. "I was just regretting my previous inhospitality."

"Hey, we'll forgive you," quipped Peter as they scrambled to their feet. "Since we're gonna blast your little party to smithereens, it's the least we can do."

"No," the eerie voice deepened and flattened with each word, "there is considerably more that you can do." Sparks flickered within the sleeves of the robe, and four proton throwers quickly came to bear on their wearer. "Since you are so determined to remain with us, we have a very special role for you. You will have the honor of helping to bring the great Viderius into this world, so that he may control this city for his entertainment!" The reverberating throat paused to cough slightly, as though realizing it was about to get too melodramatic.

"The lord Viderius requires a sacrifice. One who is untouched by the sins of the flesh," the ringleader intoned, one bony finger extending from grungy robes to point at the assembled Ghostbusters. "One of your number has been chosen."

"Hey, wait a minute," Peter began, then glanced around at his companions. Winston was shaking his head; Janine met his look with her best "none of your business" glare. As a group, they turned to stare at Egon.

The tall Ghostbuster turned as pink as the collar of his jumpsuit. "Well," he cleared his throat, then forcibly ignored his associates to face the cultist. "I'm afraid I'll have to decline the honor," he intoned back.

An unpleasant smile emerged from the hood. "No, you won't." A wave of the skeletal arms gathered the enigmatic followers, who had appeared from the shadows to form a ring around the group. "Get them!"

The cult surged forward. "Scatter!" yelled Peter, the flare of his proton beam making it unclear whether he was talking to his friends or the cult. The ring broke up, and the Ghostbusters ran for it.

Egon and Janine wound up running down the same alley. After several twists and turns, Egon pulled up at a corner to check for pursuit. Janine barely avoided crashing into him, instead crouching down beside him behind a trash dumpster. "Did we lose them?" she puffed.

"For the moment, at least," he replied in his usual tone.

His lack of breathlessness was annoying; it was tough keeping up with someone whose legs were a foot and a half longer than one's own. Equally annoying was the whole reason they'd had to run in the first place, especially since she'd be more than willing to help him correct the condition any time he'd like. Janine said, "You know, Egon, you really should do something about —"

Egon winced. "Not now, Janine." He was searching for a change of subject when cold hands grabbed each of them at the back of the neck.

"No," agreed a sepulchral voice. "Definitely not just yet."

Peter and Winston eventually met up at Ecto-1. After losing their pursuers, each man had detoured a bit to look for the others, but without success. Now they were torn between searching further and trying to deal with the cult on their own.

"Man, where are those two?" Winston wondered as Peter fidgeted impatiently. "Pete, you don't think they got caught, do you?"

"Nah," countered Peter, doing his best to act unconcerned. "Egon's too smart for that, and Janine's too mean. They probably just took a wrong turn or something."

Five minutes later, he'd changed his tune somewhat. "Boy, they better have a good explanation for this, or they're gonna wish those fruit loops had caught them."

"They sure are taking their time," Winston agreed worriedly.

"Hey," Peter said, "you don't suppose they stopped off to make Egon sacrifice-proof, do you?" He grinned suggestively. "Nah," he answered himself immediately. "Not Egon. He'd be too busy analyzing the prevalence of sacrifices in loony religions to notice."

"I think the cultists got 'em," declared Winston. Peter reluctantly agreed that it was a strong possibility. "So how're we gonna bust them out?"

"We better call Ray and tell him to get down here. Flu or no, I think we're gonna need some backup."

The cell had been constructed hastily from the remains of a fire-gutted public restroom, but whoever had done the work had known their business. One tiny window, barely big enough for a cat, let them hear the sounds of the cult working themselves up for the big event. That and the reinforced-steel, triple-bolted door were the only breaks in the concrete walls, and the 10-by-12 structure was empty of anything but dirt and useless small debris. Janine made a face at their charming surroundings. Egon sighed, and, as soon as he heard their captors move away, began examining their prison for weaknesses. He didn't find any.

As she watched him check the door for the fifth time, Janine realized she was going to have to remind him of his best chance of escape. She assured herself that she wasn't taking advantage of the situation, or him — not much, anyway — and sidled up to him, letting her hand rest 'casually' on his arm.

"Y'know, Egon, I hate to be pushy," well, sometimes, "but there is an obvious way out of this."

Egon's tolerance for blatant manipulation hit its limit. "Aren't you being a little bit opportunistic, Janine?" he snapped.

"Well, would you rather die?" she snapped back.

That brought him up short. "Ah ... well, when you put it that way ..." She did have a point there. His mind cast frantically around for some justification for saying they'd escape in time, and came up empty. An increase in the volume of the chanting outside told him he'd better make his decision quickly. "All right, Janine," he sighed, telling himself it was *not* a fate worse than death, "you win."

She grinned like Slimer discovering a cache of chocolate cookies. "Great! I mean, uh, that's a very sensible decision, Egon."

They stood staring at each other for a moment. Considering that Egon's personal experience with females didn't extend far beyond biology lab dissections, she'd better not be waiting for him to make the first move. He adjusted his glasses nervously.

Janine sighed, apparently realizing that she was going to have to help him out. She carefully took his glasses off and tucked them into the pocket of his jumpsuit with a little pat. Drawing a deep breath, she took his face in her hands and kissed him.

Almost accustomed to the light pecks she occasionally gave him, Egon wasn't expecting to have his lips repossessed. When she finally let him up for air, he expected his wide, startled eyes and befuddled expression to make Janine laugh. Instead she kissed him again, letting one hand drift subtly down to the collar of his jumpsuit.

Egon found he was getting involved in spite of himself. It wasn't that he had any real objections to the concept, he reflected, he'd just never gotten around to it ... Janine's nimble fingers slipped inside his jumpsuit to investigate his chest, and as his breathing roughened, he decided that if he had to be in this ridiculous situation, there were certainly worse people he could have been stuck in it with. The sensations she was eliciting from his body were truly ... fascinating ... She had opened the top of her own jumpsuit as well, and now she took his hand and guided it under the cloth to caress the soft skin of her shoulder, letting him do some exploring of his own.

As she peeled away his clothing, and encouraged him to do the same for her, Egon thought that maybe he'd been missing something, after all ...

Ray arrived in minutes, having found a cabbie who drove worse than he did. He was runny-nosed, bleary-eyed, and miserable, but he wasn't going to let that stop him when his friends were in trouble. "Oday, I'b here. Led's go." His normal enthusiasm somewhat dampened, he was running on determination and Dristan.

"Good man." Winston started to slap his back, but quickly moderated it to a pat on the shoulder when the pudgy Ghostbuster threatened to start coughing. The three marched into the park.

It didn't take long to find the cult. They had lit a gigantic bonfire, and were dancing around, chanting, and generally doing all those cultish things that anyone who watches late movies would expect. Peter pointed to what was left of the bathrooms. "One of them's got to be in there."

"Why only one?" Winston asked.

"Think about it, my friend. Your 'Lord Vesuvius' or whatever it is, is depending on you to produce a *virgin* sacrifice. Are you gonna lock your best candidate up with a member of the opposite sex?"

"Good point," Winston agreed, then glanced over his shoulder. Ray was being so quiet that, except for the occasional snuffle, it was hard to tell if he was still there. He looked awful. "You okay, man?"

"Uh-huh," Ray responded. It was about the longest comment he could make, since breathing was getting to be more work than it was worth.

"Hang in there, buddy," Peter encouraged. "All we've got to do is sneak down there without any of those wackos spotting us, bust through that door that looks like it's been welded shut, haul out whichever of our friends is in there, and stop the cult while we figure out where the other one is. Piece of cake."

The other two looked at him like he was nuts. In the absence of a better plan, however, they crouched down and began to sneak.

That was ... nice," Egon said quietly, his tone making it clear that 'nice' really didn't begin to cover it. Janine smiled and kissed him, enjoying the fact that for once his first reaction wasn't to pull away. She ran her fingers through the thick blond hair, which was more than a little mussed.

"Mmm, yes, it was," she murmured back, bending to nuzzle the hollow of his throat.

A triumphant-sounding howl from outside interrupted their reverie. "I think we're about to have company," Egon commented. Janine shifted to let him get up, and they started sorting out the various bits of clothing that surrounded them.

As the chanting outside increased in volume and frenzy, Janine heard Egon's reluctant warning, "You do realize, they may decide to kill us both anyway, merely from spite."

"I know," answered Janine. It was an uncomfortable topic all around. "But hey, it was worth a try." The responding silence worried her. "Wasn't it?" she asked, looking up at him through tousled red bangs.

Egon bestowed a rare smile. "Yes, Janine. It was worth it."

They both jumped as the door rattled.

Peter, Winston, and the runny-nosed Ray burst into the makeshift cell as Janine and Egon were hurrying to finish fastening their clothing. They weren't quite fast enough, though Peter struggled to keep his smirk from revealing just how much so. Janine

yelped in startlement and jumped back, bumping into Egon, who automatically put his arm around her protectively. To anyone who knew him well, the gesture told volumes, and Peter's smirk grew. Winston did a double-take, then added his own grin. Ray just sneezed.

"Well, guess you guys didn't need our help after all," Peter leered smugly. Egon blushed; it was threatening to become a permanent pigment change.

A crack of thunder cut off whatever rude reply Janine was about to make, and the three at the doorway looked up in alarm as the sky seemed to split open, coruscating purple light slicing through the clouds and smog. "Oh, man," said Winston. "I do *not* like the look of this."

Neither did any of the others. "I don't get it," Peter complained. "They're out one sacrifice, so why're things starting to get weird?"

Ray blew his nose. "Actually, I'm surprised they put you two in there together." Momentarily, he had enough air to talk, and he was going to use it, oblivious to his tall friend's embarrassment. "It's a good thing you're dressed like that, Janine."

"Yeah, I know," she agreed, pushing up a too-long sleeve. "This thing's so baggy, you can barely tell I'm *human*, let alone female."

"Uh, guys ...?" Winston interrupted urgently, and they turned to find the cult leader smiling down at them.

"Ah, my sacrifice. How nice of you to bring your friends."

Peter stepped bravely in front of the group. "I don't know what you're looking so happy about, pal, but in case you missed it, you'd better go sacrifice shopping, pronto. This one's past his expiration date."

The cultist just smiled, as the thunder and purple light increased. Peter was working up to a real good mad when he heard Winston say, "Oh, shit!"

The others turned to stare at him. "Don't you get it?" the black Ghostbuster demanded rhetorically. "They never said *what* they were sacrificing. It wasn't a virgin sacrifice, it was the sacrifice of someone's virginity!"

The cult leader deigned to smile and nod at Winston approvingly.

"Oops," Janine said flatly. Egon put his hand over his eyes, as though he could shut out this entire day as easily. Peter struggled to suppress his laughter, letting only a small snicker escape; they might be in a truckload of trouble, but something told him it was worth it for all the times Egon has teased him about thinking with body parts other than his brain. The cult leader bowed slightly at them, then wandered off to rejoin his followers.

"I think I found sombthig," Ray announced, his congestion returning mid-sentence. He had spotted Egon and Janine's confiscated equipment, piled haphazardly against the side of the little building, and was now poking through the computerized *Tobin's*. "Did you guys say —" He interrupted himself with another sneeze, sniffled miserably, and in mute frustration passed the *Guide* to Egon.

"Viderius," he muttered as he read, "Latin *videre*, 'to see' ..." His eyebrows suddenly climbed to his blond bangs.

Peter was aiming his thrower at the center of the heavenly disturbance when he heard a tiny choking noise from Egon's direction. "Gentlemen, I believe we've discovered the nature of our adversary. Thank you, Ray," he added as an aside, but it did little to distract from the neon red of his face. "Viderius is a Class Nine demigod, popular in certain circles in ancient Rome," he said in a rush. "His specific area of interest concerns copulation among *homo sapiens*, with particular emphasis on observation rather than participation. His *Tobin* entry indicates a marked preference for exotic or uncommon activities, as well as non-obstructive viewing conditions," he finished hurriedly.

Only Egon could fit that many syllables into a single breath, thought Peter, and still not communicate anything. "I know there was an explanation in there somewhere, big guy," he began, then paused. His lips moved as he reviewed what he'd just heard, then he snickered, "You're kidding, right? Tell me you're kidding." Egon reluctantly indicated otherwise, and Peter lost it completely. Between guffaws, he gasped, "You mean we've got the god of *voyeurs* here, and you just invited him over?"

"What?" screeched Janine.

"Well, he sure pigged the righb cidy," Ray commented stuffily, although he was blushing more than a little himself.

"So now what do we do? Run all over the city telling people to close their curtains?" Peter sniggered.

"It's a little more serious than that, Peter," Egon said stiffly, while restraining Janine from strangling the psychologist. "Viderius has the power to compel the entire population of New York to provide his ... entertainment."

"You mean he'd have the whole city doing nothin' but ..." Winston gestured vaguely, out of consideration for Egon's overtaxed sensibilities.

"Precisely."

Venkman got control of himself long enough to ask, "And that's supposed to be bad?"

"Think about it, Peter," Egon insisted, enunciating with biting precision. "No one would ever do *anything* else."

He thought. "Well, I *suppose* that would be bad," he conceded without conviction.

Janine was still steaming, but she clearly felt the men had lost sight of the real issue. "So how do we stop this sleazebag?" she demanded.

Egon turned his attention to *Tobin's* again, obviously grateful for something to look at besides Peter's grinning countenance. "There's one chance," he informed them. "If we can convince Viderius there's nothing here for him, that he's in the wrong place, it may distract him sufficiently for our throwers to block his entry into this dimension."

"But, Egon," Peter protested sweetly, "he's in the right place. This is New York City, for crying out loud; he's in the *perfect* place!"

"Not yet, he's not." Winston did his best to ignore both Peter and the roiling purple sky. "What do we need to do?"

A sudden crackle of violet lightning reminded them they didn't have much time. "Right now,

Viderius is still focused on this area as representative of the entire city," Egon yelled above the rising wind, gesturing to indicate their little group. "Everybody think clean thoughts!"

"You *gotta* be kidding!" Peter objected.

"Id'I work!" Ray insisted, struggling for volume. "Viderius is slighdly linked to eberyone here, espeshially Egon and Janine, because they —" Janine's glare halted his explanation. "Jusd think about anythig bud segs!" he ordered.



nd they did. Ray just let himself think about how sick he was; the flu was a great turn-off. Winston thought about the church his family attended, with its lofty ceiling and intricate stained glass. Janine tried to remember whether her car was overdue for an oil change. Peter struggled, managing to find Freudian implications in everything that came to mind, until he remembered with a grimace the pile of dirty laundry that awaited him in the basement of the firehouse.

At first, nothing happened. Egon frowned, sidled a few steps away from Janine's distracting presence, and gave his logarithm tables another try. He soon gave up on that, reverting to happy childhood memories of his first chemistry set. It was his equivalent of teddy bears and fluffy bunnies, and it worked beautifully.

In the clouds, a face was forming, a face with wide, protuberant eyes, framed by what looked suspiciously like the upturned collar of a dirty raincoat. As the Ghostbusters concentrated, the eyes crossed slightly and began to glaze over. Afterward, several observers would swear they'd heard what could only be described as a cosmic yawn.

The face faded ever so slightly. "Now!" Egon called, and five proton streams leaped into the sky, converging right between the cloudy eyes. With a frustrated roar, Viderius spat purple sparks at his opposition, but the retuned packs vaporized the weird energy like so much Kleenex. The clouds that had parted to make way for two stringy, ethereal hands, boiled over and began to obscure the face. As the gateway shrank to nothing, one ectoplasmic finger turned briefly vertical in a farewell gesture.

The normal grey of a New York fall afternoon was something of a shock, after the previous lightshow. Winston made a vague warning noise and turned his thrower toward the assembled cult, but he needn't have worried. Most of the cultists were breaking up and wandering off dejectedly. A few, including the leader, aimed deadly glares at the Ghostbusters, but they too soon drifted away. Peter thought he heard the leader mumble something about "... next year, at the Performance Art Festival ..." but he couldn't be sure.

"Man, that was enough for one day," declared Winston, stretching muscles cramped from too many hours under a proton pack. "Let's head for home."

A chorus of agreement met his suggestion, except for Peter. "What, that wasn't so bad," he argued.

"Oh, yeah? You wanna face off with a couple more Class Nines before dinner?"

"Hey, there was nothing to this one." Peter couldn't repress a sly grin. "They came, he saw," he gestured first to Janine and Egon, then to the sky above, "we conquered!"

Surprise gave Peter a few seconds' head start, but it didn't look like it was going to be enough. If they hadn't seen it with their own eyes, the others would never have believed Janine could move that fast with a forty-pound proton pack on her back.

"I just hope she doesn't hurt the car," Winston commented as he and Ray nudged the still-shocked Egon into motion, and the three trudged after their sprinting coworkers.

That evening found the denizens of the firehouse back to normal, give or take a bit. Ray and Winston had commandeered the television for a string of old movies, while Peter was condemned to the horrors of the laundry room. Egon had disappeared into his lab within minutes of arriving home, and that was where Janine found him several hours later.

For several minutes she hovered in the doorway, watching him putter with his beakers and flasks. It didn't look like he was accomplishing much, but it was often hard to tell with Egon's experiments, at least until they exploded.

"If you're planning on standing there all night, Janine, please close the door," his deep voice startled her. "You're letting in a draft."

She edged into the room, closing the door carefully behind her. He continued to focus on his workbench, keeping his back to her. "Uh, Egon?" she ventured.

"Mmm?" he responded distractedly, obviously trying to appear engrossed in his work. She noted that he had moved the same beaker to at least six different locations on the table in the last five minutes.

Janine allowed herself one deep breath for confidence. "I just wanted to let you know," she told him quietly, "that I'm not going to ... hold you to anything, because of what happened today. I mean, you were under duress, or at least you thought you were ... and I guess it's my fault that Viderius came so close to manifesting ... you probably would have figured out what was really going on if I hadn't been trying to talk you into things ..."

Egon cleared his throat awkwardly. "There's no need for you to feel responsible, Janine. I'm sure the cult had some sort of backup plan, in case we didn't, um, well ..."

"Yeah, I suppose," she rescued him.

"Actually, our, uh, central role in the proceedings gave us more influence over Viderius than we would otherwise have had. Their second choice probably would have been much more difficult for us to counteract."

Janine smiled. He had a point, but it was still very considerate of him to try to make her feel better, when it should have been the other way around. "You're a good friend, Egon," she said, hugging him.

When she finally let go, she found her exit obstructed. "Egon?"

"Mmmm?"

"You're still holding on to me."

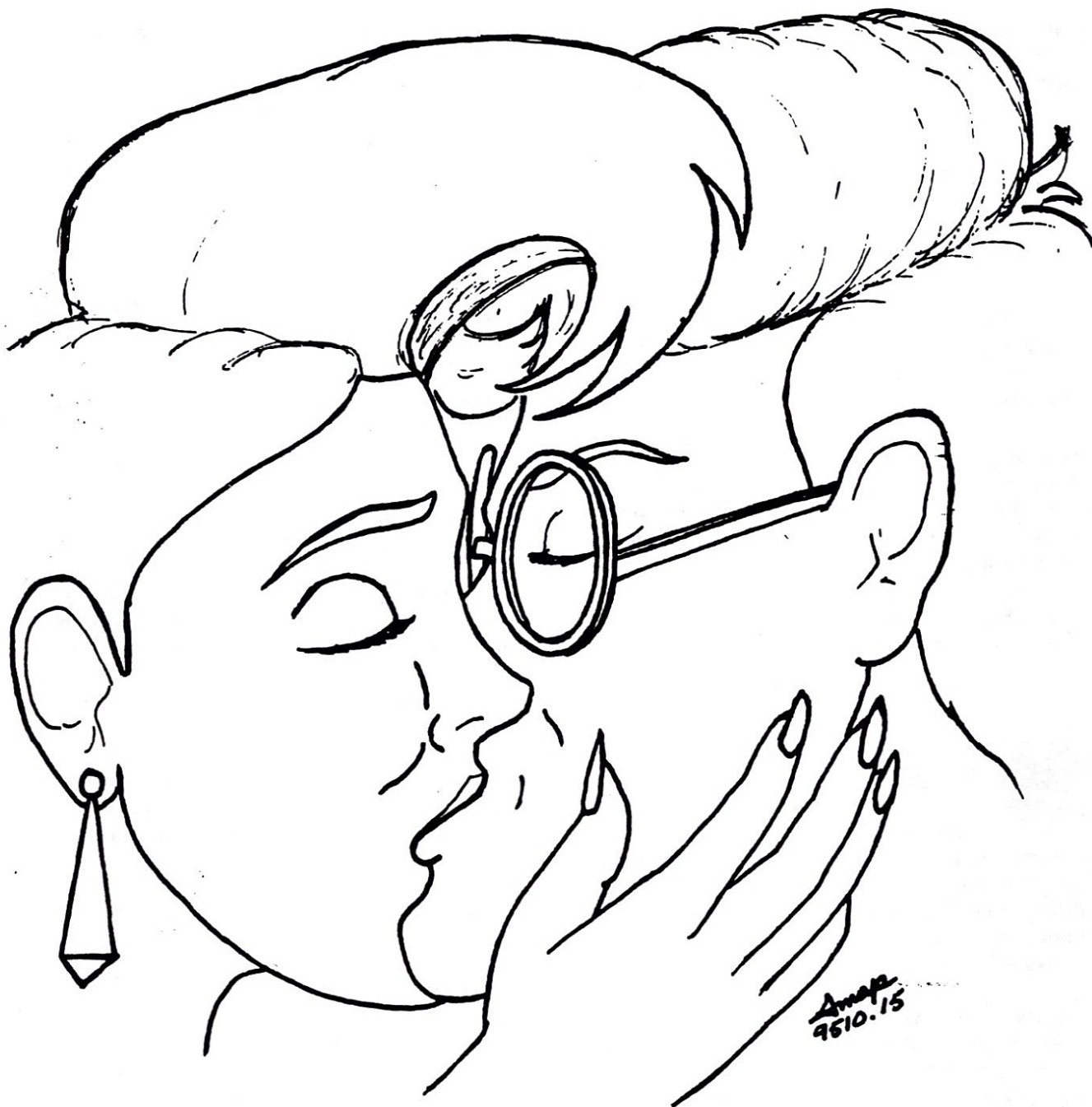
"Yes, I am," he agreed, sounding surprised, but he still didn't let go. "Do you mind?"

"... no ..." She was bewildered, but objecting was not high on her list of options. She settled back against his chest with a contented sigh.

Janine managed to behave herself for all of thirty seconds. She'd discovered, among other things, that he was extremely sensitive to being kissed in the hollow of his throat, and their relative heights made it far too tempting to check if he still had the same response. His sudden sharp intake of breath told her he did.

She looked up to find both confusion and intense curiosity in Egon's face. She smiled hopefully at him, and he blinked. His head dipped slightly toward her, a gesture she decided to take as encouragement until proven otherwise.

As their lips met, Janine hoped that Peter had *lots* of laundry to do, and was exceedingly glad that she'd closed the lab door.



Call for Papers

FRIDAY THE 13TH

A chill breeze slithered down the street, curling round the legging-clad ankles of Micki Foster as she dug the day's mail from the box outside Curious Goods. Long-gone was the sign proclaiming "Vendredi's Antiques," but the legacy of Uncle Lewis's shop, and his pact with the Devil, lingered like the aftertaste of spoiled meat.

As the wind whipped up her thick, curly reddish hair, Micki shivered, drawing the edges of her peacoat closer around her, and glanced absently at the mail. Bills. Circulars. A letter or two. And a large white envelope, emblazoned with the logo of the Georgetown Institute. Mail from respected institutions wasn't unusual; Curious Goods still did a decent business in antiques, and several of their pieces had been purchased for antiquities collections and anthropological studies over the years. It was a good thing — Jack Marshak, her partner in the store, didn't have an unlimited fortune, although his accumulated savings had never been anything to sneeze at. But the activities for which they really kept the store open — the retrieval and storage of the cursed objects her uncle had circulated on behalf of the Devil — were by no means inexpensive operations.

She shrugged within the cocoon of her coat, smiling ruefully as she placed the source of her dark thoughts. Another year had passed, another year without her cousin Ryan at her side in their fight to gather together the indestructible objects of evil. Jack was, as always, wonderful, a true pillar of strength. Johnny Ventura had, surprisingly, stayed with them all these years, sniffing out the objects and often reclaiming them through pure bravado. But they weren't Ryan. She'd never realized just how much she'd miss him until he was gone. Not gone, just out of her reach. The occasional note from his mother told her of Ryan's progress through his second adolescence, but she knew that the adult he would grow into again

would not be the adult he had been. And she knew that she had lost the best friend she would ever know.

The bell chimed as she slipped back into the warmth of the shop. Jack stood by the cash register, looking like a grizzled sea captain at the helm of his ship, and she smiled. He'd spent many years at sea, travelling the world in search of the unusual, and the sea still clung to him like a mantle. He looked up and smiled at her, warming the cold center of her heart.

"Anything interesting?" he asked eagerly, nodding toward the sheaf of mail clutched in her wind-reddened hands.

"Same old, same old. Except for this — something from the Georgetown Institute."

"Georgetown? Let me see," he replied, extending his hand for the large white envelope.

She walked up the stairs to join him by the register, and handed him the mail, then shrugged out of her coat. "Brrr. It's cold out — colder than usual for this time of year. You don't suppose the vault —"

"It's secure, Micki. No, it's just an Alberta Clipper coming down early for a visit," he reassured her.

Containment of the cursed objects had been a concern, until the crypt beneath the store had been discovered a few years earlier. After Ryan. Johnny had helped them set up the crypt to store the objects. It should have been Ryan. She shook herself again, and Jack glanced over at her with concern in his wrinkle-wreathed eyes. "I know," he said softly.

And she knew that he did. He, too, felt the loss of their missing third almost as keenly as she did. He had held Ryan down while the transformation forced by Satan's minion took place, from adult to Devil-possessed pre-teen. He had had to introduce the child to his mother again, after the possession had been broken. Like her, he had had to say goodbye to a cherished friend, a friend who had no memory of either of them.

"Well, what's it say?" she asked lightly, trying to break the black mood that threatened to overwhelm her.

Jack opened the envelope carefully, and peered in. A smile spread across his lined face as he fished out a couple of sheets of paper. "Julianna Moorhouse," he breathed, the smile turning into a full-fledged grin. "I haven't seen her in years. Well, well!"

"Who's Julianna Moorhouse?" Micki inquired, settling against the counter and hugging herself.

"An old friend, really. Someone I met when I used to do magic. A believer, if you will. And now she holds the Cultural Studies Chair at Georgetown Institute. She's inviting us to a paranormal conference to be held at the Institute," Jack added, passing the letter over to Micki.

"That could be useful. You never know who we might meet there," Micki observed, scanning the letter. "Jack, it's addressed to you, me and Ryan," she pointed out, her voice plaintive.

"She couldn't know about Ryan, Micki. If Julianna's records are from when we first renamed the store, she'd have no way of knowing that he's no longer around."

"Yes, but Jack —" she looked up at him with huge, liquid eyes, her expression pleading — "don't you think ... well, if these people attending the conference are for real ..."

"That one of them might be able to restore Ryan? Micki," he said gently, his hands touching her elbows lightly, "Ryan was transformed into a child by the strongest power we can imagine. The Devil made him a child of evil, and the Blessed Virgin released him from that evil. But she didn't see fit to restore him to adulthood. Don't you think she had a reason for that?"

Micki sighed; it was an old argument. "I know, Jack. It's just ..."

"I miss him, too. And I'm frustrated that Helen won't let us see him, either. But after what he went through, perhaps this is for the best. For him, Micki."

"I know. It's just that ... sometimes I'm so tired. Sometimes I really need ... don't get me wrong, Jack, I really do love you, but he's family. I don't know, there's ..."

"A connection? Yes, I'm sure there is. You and Ryan were very close, and I wouldn't be surprised to learn that he shared some of your sensitivity. Perhaps not as powerful as your own psychic powers, but I do believe it was there." He lifted a hand to touch her cheek, and she leaned into the touch, feeling the roughness of his hand against the smoothness of her face. Jack was old, old enough to be her father, but he was a good friend, and without him, she didn't know what she'd do.

"I'd like to accept the invitation," he said softly. "I'd love to see Julianna again. You'd like her — no-nonsense, practical, brilliant, but totally entranced by all things paranormal. We could learn a lot. And I think we might find some other people who might be able to help us track down more of Lewis's antiques. And Johnny would probably enjoy Washington's nightlife."

"What, close the store down — all three of us go?"

"Do us all good to get away. May be a bit of a busman's holiday, but that might do us some good, too. What d'you say? Hmm?"

She smiled up at him and nodded. "Okay." Then she lifted the letter and held it before his face. "Says here she'd like us to present a paper. Think we could come up with a publishable subject?"

Jack's eyes drifted involuntarily toward where the manifest lay, the book containing records of every cursed object and its disposition. "I suspect I could come up with an idea or two. If you help."

"Sure. But you'll have to correct my spelling. I'm hopeless without spellcheck," she agreed, laughing lightly.

"That's okay — Johnny's hopeless even with it," he joked, and together they ascended the steps from the shop to the private quarters above.

After Micki Foster and Jack Marshak had disappeared into the apartment, two figures resolved themselves in the dim light of the cluttered antiques store. A tall, regal-looking woman, dressed in a shimmering blue, and a shorter man, clothed in a severe steel gray suit, stepped out of the shadows beneath the stairs. The man shook his head, glancing around him with an air of distaste.

"Triggers. A store full of triggers," he complained.

"Old things, yes," the woman agreed. "Humans have a fascination for old things, Steel." She lifted a statue and held it in her hands a moment, her brilliant blue eyes glowing softly. The glow dimmed, and she turned toward him, smiling faintly. "Not all are triggers, though. Some are simply old. Cherished through a lifetime, then abandoned. Sad, but not dangerous."

"And the vault? The crypt beneath the store?"

"Dangerous in a different way. On a plane other than Time. But contained. They're like us, you know."

"Like us?" the man repeated, incredulous. "Unlikely, Sapphire."

"No. They are agents of a higher power. Their job is to locate and contain these objects of power. The objects themselves cannot be destroyed, but they can be safely contained. Like Time."

"Time can't be contained. Only held at bay."

"Perhaps," the woman called Sapphire replied with a smile. She turned away, stepped lightly up the stairs, and extended her hand toward the ornately tooled cover of the book known as the manifest. Her hand hovered over the binding, and the strange glow infused her eyes again for a moment before fading into nothingness. "Not dangerous in itself. But it chronicles a lifetime of treachery."

"Why are we here, Sapphire? They've received their invitation to Moorhouse's conference, and they'll go. We don't need to do anything to ensure their presence."

"We need all three of them. There's still the matter of Ryan Dallion."

"His transformation was the work of your 'higher power'," reminded Steel, ungraciously.

"It places Time out of phase. He has already lived through adolescence once. It is time to put Time right."

"How?"

"There are forces which are gathering. Forces which are driven by that higher power. We need only to help them along."

"Superstition," spat Steel, spinning away to stalk toward the door.

"Real enough. Some call these forces by religious names, but the forces exist nonetheless."

Steel paused, turning slowly toward her. "You've been in communication with them," he accused.

Sapphire shrugged elegantly, a tiny lift of her blue-draped shoulder. "Allies, if you will. There was a reason for the transformation. That reason has passed. But the possibility of a Time-break exists. *That's* why we're here, Steel."

"You're always better briefed than I am," he complained sullenly.

"I listen better. Read between the lines."

"Act out of your own initiative."

"Or intuition," she added with a smile.

"Perhaps," he admitted grudgingly. "When?"

"Soon. Very soon."

"And the dangers?"

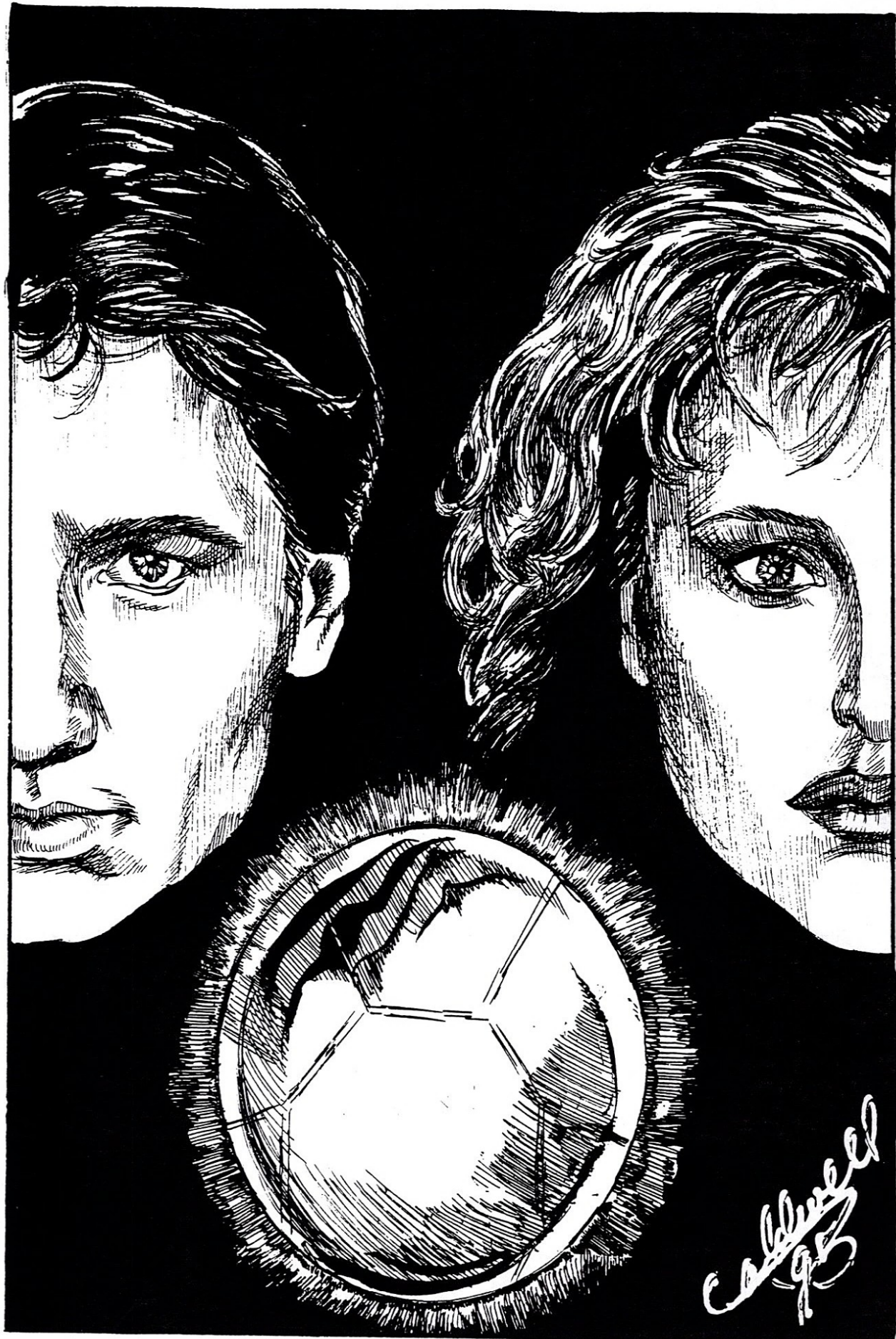
"Very real. But containable. With their help," she amended, nodding toward the upper floor.

"With the help of humans?"

"Sometimes it's necessary to use local talent. Their knowledge of the possible dangers can be instructive."

"Perhaps," he repeated.

"We have other tasks for the moment. It isn't time for them yet." With that, she took a step down the stairs and vanished. Shaking his head, he followed suit.



The **X** Files

Hummer

by Rory Cottrell



Hamover Cavern
 25 miles outside Las Cruces,
 New Mexico
 Friday, May 12, 1995
 1:25 p.m. MDT

Tom "Mac" MacCarthy stood on the carbonate platform of rock, coiling the extra lengths of rope he had brought with him, as he waited for his friends to descend from the ledge above. The bright beam of light from the Mag-Lite lamp on his helmet jumped around the cavernous room as his head bobbed and weaved to avoid the slightly whipping ropes. He laid his eyes on the one closest to landing.

"Nice view from down here," he said, shining his lamp on Lynda's rear.

Lynda Simpson held onto her brake line, dangling a good twenty feet above the cave floor. "One more smart remark and I'll drop on you."

Bowing, with his arms outstretched, Mac mock-pleaded forgiveness. "I did not mean to offend thee, Your Holiness. It would be my pleasure if you would drop on me."

"Shut up, Mac. You're getting on my nerves," Dave Schneider yelled from up top.

Saluting Nazi-style, Mac did his best Sergeant Schultz impersonation. "*Ja wold, Commandante.* I know noootherggg."

"Shut up, Mac!" Lynda and Dave bellowed.

Mac shimmied out of his gear and helmet and started prowling around the nicks and crannies of their underworld playground like a little school kid out on a field trip. The caves were a favorite hang-out spot for the more adventurous entrepreneurs of weekend warrior sports. The Outdoors Club at New Mexico State University didn't think it was appropriate for the numbers of people they got for their monthly trips, and

wouldn't fund one last expedition before graduation. It was virgin territory, as far as Mac was concerned. Many people did not know about the place.

Lynda dropped down, and with expert hands was untangled from her rope and gear in under a minute. She took a few minutes to check out the scenery, always amazed at the beauty of the calcitic columns.

"I told you this would be better than those stupid activities the Senior Week Committee had planned," Mac told her.

He jumped off his ledge. He was holding a length of cord between his hands, and used it as sort of a miniature jump rope. Legs curled up toward his chest, he jumped through the loop of his arms and rope and nailed a ten point landing next to Lynda. He held the cord out like a sword.

"My name is Inigo Mantoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

"My name is Lynda Simpson. You are annoying. Prepare to run."

Lynda lunged after Mac, sending him sprawling into Dave as he hit the ground. Dave shoved back, taking a swipe at Mac's head. Missing, he settled for a potshot with his leather gloves, hitting Mac squarely in the small of the back.

Still running around the cave like a rabbit on a sugar rush, Mac started spouting off at the mouth again, barely taking a breath between words.

"Hey, do you guys remember that show, *War of the Worlds*?"

"What? The George Pal movie?" Dave asked, stepping out of his gear.

Mac shook his head. "Nah. That TV show. The Blackwood Project? The loony astrophysicist and the Indian guy and the hacker in the wheelchair and the chick microbiologist?"

Lynda chucked her helmet at him. "Chick is not a word."

"Okay, female microbiologist. Anyway, didn't the Advocacy live in the caves around here?"

"That's Nevada, numb-nuts," Lynda pointed out. "*Quantum Leap* had their base of operations in New Mexico. And here I thought you were the wellspring of useless TV trivia."

Mac drop kicked the helmet toward the rest of their gear. "Whatever. What do you think the likelihood is that we could find alien life living down in these caves? Or some kind of mutant? They did do all that nuclear testing down here, and who knows what the government is hiding? They didn't tell those uranium miners about the health hazards, and now they're popping up with lung cancer and all sorts of stuff. And what about those prisoners that were shot up with irradiated blood? That committee is supposed to close down soon. Think we'll ever really know the extent of the government's mischief? What if they're keeping the remains of the ship that crashed in Roswell down here somewhere?"

"Turn your brain off, Mac. You're having another stupid attack," Dave said, setting down on one of the ledges, drawing circles in the dust with the toe of his boot.

"Stupid is as stupid does, sir."

"Come here, Forrest, I'll give you something to Gump about," Lynda warned. She had whipped out a handkerchief and was wiping her brow with it. She wadded it into a ball and nailed him on the forehead. He fell backward in a dramatic heap.

"How the hell did you pass your English comps with all that garbage running through that twisted little brain of yours?" she demanded, retrieving her kerchief and stuffing it into her back pocket.

Mac shrugged his shoulders. "I memorized all the books. 'Whether tis nobler in the mind —'"

"Cut the crap, Shakespeare." Dave grabbed his pack and started rummaging through it for the sandwiches he'd packed. "Must be nice to have a full ride to NYU."

"That's if he graduates," Lynda chided. "There is that little matter of a humanities' requirement that he neglected to fulfill."

"Humanities schmanities," Mac pfaed. "They changed the rules on me midway through fifth

semester. Three years ago, English 302 took care of the humanities requirement."

"Not anymore, Mac-pie." Dave stuffed half a sandwich in his mouth. He swept his free hand through the air. "Don't sweat it. McNulty'll make sure you graduate. Magna cum laude and all."

Mac rolled to his knees, face contorted in concentration. "Hey guys, shut up a minute ... Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Dave asked. He listened, heard nothing. "Check those ridalin levels there, Spaz. You're hearing things."

"No, I hear it, too." Lynda stood up, walked toward where she thought the noise was coming from. "Sort of like a hum."

"Really low frequency," Mac added. He joined Lynda near one of the many branching conduits that led to other subsidiary caves.

Dave walked over to where they stood. "Nope. Don't hear it."

"I'm sure it's coming from in here," Lynda said, walking inside the tunnel.

"Hey, guys, not without the flashlights," Dave insisted. He ran back and picked up their helmets. "There's no telling how deep some of the drop offs are in here."

Mac led the way, bouncing his arm as if leading a parade. "Off we go, into the wild, blue yonder —"

The tunnel emptied into a natural underground stream. Mac plowed through the small trickle of water, splashing the backs of his legs and anyone close enough to be in his wake. Dave and Lynda kept to the edges, moss- and slime-covered as they were.

"It's getting louder," Mac announced, picking up the pace. "I think we're getting close."

Dave shook his head. "I still don't hear anything."

"I do. Keep going." Lynda pushed him forward.

The stream tunnel opened up into another cavernous room, the water cascading into a

plunge pool about twenty feet below. The water was mysteriously lit from below, casting a strange green glow. There were no outside light sources, no air tunnels to the surface.

Mac made as if he would take a swan dive off the ledge. "Any takers?"

Dave grabbed Mac's belt loops. "Don't even think it. We climb down. Over there." He pointed toward a series of jutting ledges about fifteen feet to the right.

"Whoa, what's that?" Mac exclaimed, pointing his head gear toward the other side of the cavern.

The lamp light reflected off something metallic, roughly spherical in shape in that it looked like a very large soccer ball with too little air in it. Hexagonal panels fit together loosely around the central cylindrical core. Six thin hinged metal legs jutted out of the main body near its base, nestled within cracks in the bedrock. Otherwise, the body appeared to be suspended in mid-air.

"What do you think it is?" Lynda asked, bringing up the rear as they carefully climbed down the talus pile of fallen cavity rock.

"It sort of looks like a lunar pod." Dave jumped to the floor of the cavern, rolling to his knees to avoid injury. "Like that picture Eddie's got on his wall, the Apollo moon landing."

Mac started to dance around like a lunatic again. "I knew the Apollo moon landings were fake! Ha, what did I tell you. The government set it all up and hid the evidence down here. Wait till Mikey hears about this!"

"Shut up, Mac!" Lynda and Dave shouted.

"This is not part of some conspiracy, toadie," Lynda continued. "It's just some hunk of junk."

Dave shook his head as he approached the alleged hunk of junk. "I don't think so." Holding his hands in front of him, he circled the construction, making an invisible wall out of necessity. "This thing is giving off heat. A lotta heat."

"Hey, Dave, check out this pool!" Mac leaned over the edge, nose mere inches from the pool's surface. "What do you make of this stuff? It's

glowing." He had a strand of some algae in his hands for Dave to inspect.

"The algae's all over the walls," Lynda observed. "Think this is the stuff your dad was talking about?"

Mac shrugged his shoulders, and tipped nearer to the water's edge, staring into the depths.

Grabbing his belt loops, Dave pulled Mac away from the edge. "Do you have some sort of death wish?"

"It's just salt water, see?" Mac splashed his friend liberally, gaining a viscous growl in response.

"That's it." Dave grabbed Mac's shirt collar and waistband and hefted the scrawny fellow into the plunge pool. The splash echoed loudly in the cavernous room.

"You sonuvabitch. You threw me in!" Mac stood in the pool; the water level came to mid-thigh.

"Hey, guys, if you're finished being childish, this thing is getting hotter," Lynda said, backing away from the pod.

Mac waded out of the water and stopped mid-tread, watched in amazement as the water glowed greener. "This is too weird."

"The heat's coming off in waves," Lynda told them as they joined her near the pod. "What's going on, Dave?"

"Why are you asking me?" Dave asked.

"Because you're the science major," Mac said, stepping closer. His hand stayed before his eyes to shield them from the heat.

"Biology, guys. I could tell you all about the physiology of that glowing algae, not why some dilapidated piece of shit machine is going berserk. Is something humming?"

Mac lightly pounded his fist on Dave's shoulder. "He can be taught!"

"This is what you guys were hearing in the cave?" Dave shook his head, as if knocking cobwebs from his fuzzy brain.

A furnace blast of heat drove the trio from the pod's perimeter. Mac stumbled back into the pool and immediately yelped, smoke emanating from his shins. "Shit! Ow —" He jumped out of the water.

"What the hell just happened?" Lynda knelt down and examined the burns on Mac's shins.

"I don't know — Ow, cut that out!"

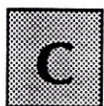
Lynda's hand hovered over his mottled and blistered leg. "These are second degree burns, Mac. The water did this?"

He didn't get a chance to answer. Bright flashes filled the room. Mac covered his eyes, wincing at the bright light. He clamped his hands over his head, an ear-drum piercing whine emanating from the machine.

Lynda turned away from the bright flashes. She could not hear anything, not even her own voice screaming, "What the hell is going on?"

Dave pushed the others toward the tunnel entrance. "Get out of here, now!"

The whine increased, deafening and pounding. Before they reached the tunnel, all three were down on their knees, heads held tightly against their legs. One by one they fell into the plunge pool.



**Crime Scene, Highway 10 Rest Stop
Las Cruces, New Mexico
Monday, May 15, 1995
9:03 a.m. MDT**

Agent Fox Mulder flipped through the case file and grimaced. This was not what he wanted to see first thing on a Monday morning, even though his stomach told him it was nearly lunch time. The thought of lunch nearly turned his stomach. He stopped near the chalk outlines of three bodies on the asphalt parking lot.

At least the weather was dry. Washington D.C. had been deluged by rain for nearly a week, and he wanted away from wet, dreary weather.

Yellow police tape still sectioned off the parking lot from curious onlookers. The rest stop had been closed down for months due to a cut back in state spending on highway maintenance. The

local sheriff's department did not expect many visitors to the crime scene.

Agent Dana Scully walked up behind him, engrossed in the police report. "It says here that they were reported missing by friends Friday night," she told him, thumbing through the pages. "They didn't show up for a keg party at the decedents' house."

"I don't know what they were chugging, but it sure wasn't beer." Mulder handed her the photos of the crime scene.

Scully studied one picture after another. The victims' skin, what was left of it, was mottled and flaky. Severe burns marked the appendages and torso. The black and white photos left nothing to the imagination. Close-ups of some of the larger burns showed massive tissue degeneration and necrosis. Very little blood.

Mulder matched photos with victims' names and started to read off their bios. "Lynda Simpson, age 22, speech pathology major, president of the Outdoors club, SPACE activist, and coordinator of a local chapter of Big Brother, Big Sister. Thomas MacCarthy, age 21, English major, quite the thespian. He's had a lead in the last three productions of the Drama club. Captain of the Brainstormers team. David Schneider, age 22, biology major, basketball player, vice president of the Outdoors club. All attended New Mexico State University College over in Las Cruces. They were supposed to go through ceremonies yesterday afternoon."

"These look like acid burns. Who found the bodies?"

"Mr. and Mrs. John Blythe of Midland, Texas. Las Cruces field office has them for questioning."

Scully closed the file folder, tucked it under her arm. "Why were we called in?"

"I'm glad you asked that, Scully." Mulder walked over toward their rental car, a red Pontiac sedan.

Scully did not follow. "Don't tell me. You have an X-File on this."

The tell-tale red and white folder appeared in Mulder's hands. He laid out its contents on the hood of the car. Scully reluctantly joined him.

"Forty years ago, a man in West Texas was found dead near a closed down gas station. Second and third degree burns over ninety percent of his body. Two years later, a woman in Arizona was found dead in the backyard of her split level ranch house, burns over 75 percent of her body. Investigators found no evidence of fire or acid scarring near the crime scenes."

"They may have been killed elsewhere and dumped afterward. I don't see a connection."

"Did you notice those kids' clothes?"

"Yeah," she replied, quizzical. "That was odd. They were hardly damaged."

Mulder tapped his finger on one of the photographs. "The same thing happened in Arizona and West Texas. But that's not the best part. You're gonna love this. What do you think was the cause of death?"

"I would assume the burns have something to do with it," Scully answered. The smart-aleck smirk on his face told her she had guessed wrong. "Tell me, oh insightful one, how did these people die?"

"Drowning. Fluids in the lungs were like nothing the coroners had ever seen. And the nearest body of water with comparable saline content was over 100 miles away for the latest victims. The same is true for Arizona and West Texas."

Scully slapped her copy of the police report against his chest and walked over to the passenger car door. "Where are the bodies now? I assume you want me to do the autopsies."

Mulder smiled, gathered up the file on the hood of the car. "You read me like a book."

Scully opened the car door. "Comic book, maybe."

Mulder stepped back, as if hit with an arrow through the heart.

"Get in the car, Mulder," Scully said, slipping on her sunglasses and a seat belt.

Mulder jumped in the car, shoved both the X-File and the police report between the seat cushions. He put the car in gear as he fastened the seat belt, and peeled out of the rest stop and onto the main

highway with a dust cloud rivaling a monster truck.

He rolled up the windows and turned on the air conditioner. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel.

Scully waited for him to spill everything he knew about the case, as he always did, in that all-so-endearing, neurotic tone of voice. He was in a particularly weird mood this morning, had even been hyper on the plane ride. He usually slept or listened quietly to headphones.

"Okay, Mulder, tell me how you got wind of this case? The bodies were found less than twenty-four hours ago."

Mulder reached for the ever-present bag of shelled sunflower seeds on the dash. "Picked it off the wire last night."

"Don't you ever sleep?"

"Who has time to sleep? You miss too much when you sleep."

Scully rolled her hands forward in circles. "The case, Mulder?"

A seed snapped loudly between his teeth. "Came in through the Las Cruces field office. The investigative officer called for some info on the kids, and Danny over in Research, found something on one of the kids he thought I might be interested in."

"Which one?" Scully asked, picking up the case file to find the photos.

"Thomas MacCarthy. He's on file with a bunch of other Hummers with the center of UFO Activities and —"

Scully held up her hand. "Wait a minute. Hummers?"

Mulder cracked another sunflower seed between his teeth and started chewing. "Hummers claim that they can hear this low-frequency hum that no one else seems to hear. There's this one guy out here in New Mexico who has claimed he has made a recording of this hum." Scully looked at him skeptically. "They're documented cases."

"What do these Hummers have to do with UFOs?"

"Someone made a claim that aliens were responsible for the low humming noise, as a means of taking over our minds. But, as I was saying before you so rudely interrupted me, some of these people are also on file with the defense department. Someone claims that the ELF project is causing the low frequency that they're hearing."

"The ELF project? You mean how the military contacts submarines in the Arctic?"

"Among other things," Mulder replied, a gleam in his eye.

"So what's your interest in the case? Aliens or conspiracy?"

"Neither. I wanted out of the rain."



BI Field Office
Las Cruces, New Mexico
10:14 a.m. MDT

Mulder had discarded his suit jacket long ago, leaving it behind in the back seat of the rental. His shirt sleeves were rolled past his elbows, tie loosened at the neck. Dress code be damned. Scully sat at the end of the table, with a pad of paper and pen. A tiny tape recorder was sitting in front of, the record button depressed.

Leaning with elbows on his knees, he faced John Blythe and his spouse, Katherine. They were retirement age, wearing matching floral prints and khakis. Katherine, still looking a bit spooked, held onto her husband's proffered hand with an iron grip.

"Mr. and Mrs. Blythe, I just want to ask you a few questions."

John patted his wife's hand gently. "We've already talked with the police, yesterday morning."

Mulder nodded his head. "Yes, I know, I read the transcripts. I just want to clear up a few details."

John looked at his wife; she slowly looked away. He pleaded, "This has been very hard on my wife. Our youngest is only a few years older than those poor people."

"I completely understand, but it would help us a lot if you could answer our questions."

John nodded, squeezed his wife's hand. "All right, Agent Mulder. Ask away."

"Why did you stop at that particular rest stop? There was a road sign that said it was closed."

"I had been driving for nearly four hours. I wanted to get out and stretch the legs a bit. We're on our way to the Grand Canyon, we have reservations. That's where we spent our honeymoon."

Mulder smiled. The mention of the Grand Canyon seemed to calm Katherine. He turned back to his questions. "So, you didn't see anything suspicious? No other cars? No other people?"

John shook his head. "The road was deserted. It was only about ten in the morning."

"How did you come across the bodies?"

"Well, like I said, I wanted to stretch my legs. We parked at the other end of the parking lot, near the pavilion. I saw the kids as I drove by, but I thought they were just camping there or something."

"What made you think that?"

"They were covered with a blanket."

Mulder looked to Scully. The mention of a blanket was news to her as well. There was no blanket in any of the crime scene photos. She scribbled something down in her notebook.

"When did you realize they were dead?"

John swallowed. "There was a coyote sitting on the ridge. My wife and I slipped back in the car, just so we could watch him, maybe snap a few pictures. I pulled out the camera, and we waited. It, ah, came over to one of the bodies, and started sniffing around. He tore at the blanket. That's when I noticed — them. We drove out of there and looked for a telephone."

"Did you see any footprints, tire tracks in the area?"

Shaking his head, he squeezed his wife's hand again. "No, sir."

"Did you take any pictures of the coyote?"

"Ah, yeah." He elbowed his wife to get her purse. She shuffled through her purse and pulled out a hand-held automatic Canon camera. "Right here." John gave the camera to Mulder.

Mulder examined the camera. He turned it on; the picture count read 23. "Can I borrow your film? We'll get it processed for you, free of charge, as long as we can have copies of the coyote pictures. You may have picked up something that forensics didn't." He gave the camera back to John.

"Sure," John said. "We were near the end of the roll." He rewound the film, pulled it out of the camera and gave it to Mulder.

Mulder read the canister, memorized it, then tossed it to Scully. She caught it one-handed, and placed it in an evidence bag.

"We'll see if we can get you on your way to the Grand Canyon by this afternoon. And I'll call to make sure your reservations are still confirmed," Mulder offered. He stood and shook John's hand.

"Thank you very much, Agent Mulder."

"No, thank you."

Mulder led them out of the little office, and handed them off to one of the locals. Then he stepped back into the room, and closed the door. He turned his chair around, and sat in it backward, resting his forearms on the back.

"So what do you think?" he asked her.

"The Grand Canyon is lovely this time of year," she quipped, closing her notebook.

Mulder pshawed, and grabbed the recorder. "Do you remember anything about a blanket in the police reports?"

"No. That doesn't mean it wasn't there. Maybe someone was a little sloppy, and didn't list it with the evidence collected."

"Maybe. Listen, I'll get these photos developed, see what happened to that blanket. How long will the autopsies take?"

"Three, maybe four hours," she answered.

Mulder stood, replaced the chair and headed for the door. Holding it open for her, he said as she passed, "Okay, meet me back at the motel around 1:30. We'll grab some lunch and figure our game plan from there."

He closed the door behind him.

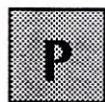


Photo Lab
Las Cruces Field Office
Las Cruces, New Mexico
11:34 a.m. MDT

Pulling the ten by twelve sheet of proofs out of the rinse, Mulder shook the sheet free of drips and held it up to the red light bulb hanging above his head. Finding the section that he needed, he placed the sheet on the light table. Flipping the switch, the table lit slowly, first the left side, then the right.

Mulder picked up the magnifying glass and slowly moved it over the five pictures taken by John Blythe at the crime scene. Two were telephoto snaps of a lone coyote sitting on the ridge. Photogenic, but not what he was looking for. The next two were not that much of a help either.

The last was a wide angle shot. The animal was closer to the parking lot this time. Though the focus was clearly on the animal, in the foreground, there was a blurry image, offset from the black pavement of the parking lot.

He picked up the negatives and headed out the door, grabbing the overhead string to shut off the red lamp above him as he walked by. As the door closed behind him, he caught the eye of Agent Jerry Doran across the small cubby hole room.

Mulder held up the proof sheet. "Got it."

"Let's run it through the computer," Jerry said, grabbing his jacket.



And I thought my office was cramped, Mulder thought as he stepped into Jerry Doran's home away from home. He felt an appreciation that only another slob at heart could understand. It was a good thing Scully was not with him; he would never hear the end of it.

Mulder was even more impressed with the screen saver on the idled computer; Playboy bunnies posed in provocative bathing suits, another reason

to be glad Scully was not around. He'd been slightly more than embarrassed the last time she'd found his little collection in the desk drawer.

Jerry sat down at the desk, moved the mouse to bring up the desktop. "Let me just pull the image off the net, and we'll set to work."

Mulder grabbed a piece of desk and leaned over Jerry's shoulder. "That one," he indicated, pointing at the bottom image.

"Okay." Jerry clicked on the image. A blown-up version of it showed up on the screen. "Where?"

"Lower left, the white blob on the asphalt."

Jerry maneuvered a window around the blob and it enlarged to screen size. Blurry pixels filled the screen. The agent typed in a few keystrokes, and the picture cleared.

"Not much to work with," Jerry commented. He tried to sharpen the image some more. Details slowly came into focus.

It was a white blanket of some sort. The nature of the material was difficult to determine from the resolution of the photo, but Mulder guessed it was stiff, like tarpaulin, by the way it kinked in the center. A reddish pink corner attracted his attention.

"Can you zoom in on that?" he asked, pointing to the corner.

Another enlargement, another enhancement.

"Looks like a hand to me," Jerry said.

Mulder chewed on his lower lip. "There's a ring on the third finger, see there. None of the victims had on any jewelry when the police catalogued the scene."

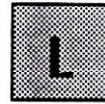
"Somebody beat us to the bodies," Jerry said. "There are all sorts of vagrants out there along the highway. It's all state-protected land. Troopers find campers and shanty towns all up and down that stretch of road."

Mulder stood, paced the room. "I'm going to need copies of these images, best detail you can give me. And can you arrange for someone to search the area again? Maybe the person who stole the

jewelry and blanket is still around. What's the number for the morgue?"

"555-6835."

Mulder picked up Jerry's extension and started dialing.



as Cruces Morgue
Las Cruces, New Mexico
11:53 p.m. MDT

A lab techie tapped on the glass pane separating the examine room from the coroner's office. Through the glass, his voice sounded muffled. "Agent Scully, there's an Agent Mulder on the line for you," he said, pointing to the phone in her hand. "Extension's over there on the wall, line 2."

Scully waved a thanks, pulled off the latex gloves and stepped over to the phone on the wall. She tossed the gloves on a nearby table. "Mulder?"

"Yeah, Scully. The photo came through, there was a blanket of some sort at the scene. It also appears that some of the victims were wearing jewelry before the authorities got there."

Scully leaned against the wall. "Someone robbed the bodies between the time the Blythe's found the bodies and the police arrived?"

"Looks that way. I'm headed out to the crime scene with Agent Doran now, maybe dig up a few clues, maybe do a bit of searching. I suspect the person who did it hasn't strayed too far. How's it going over there?"

"I was about to start on the MacCarthy boy when you called."

"What have you found?"

"The tissue cultures won't be ready for another hour or so, but it looks as if your theory panned out." She looked over at the scale where a lung still lay. "I found some sort of saline fluid in Lynda Simpson's lungs and blood. The techs are trying to determine its chemistry now." She paused to lean over and grab the folder with the X-File in it. She flipped to the appropriate page. "On a hunch, I pulled out the autopsy report on the Texas man for comparison. Guess what I found?"

"Our three victims have ruptured ear drums."

"Yeah, how did you kn — never mind."

"Before or after the acid?"

"I don't know that yet. This is taking longer that I thought it would. I still want to see if I can figure out the nature of the acid burns. Forensics is running the clothing for trace evidence. Maybe we can find some of the compound in the fabric."

"Okay. Listen, it's almost noon now. The search is probably going to take me all afternoon. Why don't we meet for dinner instead? At some point I want to run out to the college. If the bodies were dumped at the rest stop, I want to know where they were supposed to be."

"All right. When I'm done here, I'll make a few phone calls, see if I can catch some of their friends before they go home for break."

"Sounds like a plan. See you later, Scully."

There was a click on the other side of the line. She hung up the phone, found the box of latex gloves to grab a fresh pair.

The body was on the metal table. All photos had been taken earlier that morning.

There was another tap at the window pane. It was the same techie that gave her the phone message. "Agent Scully, I'm going to get some lunch. Want anything while I'm out?"

Scully tried to keep from looking at the body of Lynda Simpson, still lying on the other slab, unceremoniously draped with a translucent white sheet. Autopsies always took away her appetite.

"No, I'm fine. Thanks."

"Something to drink?"

"Anything cold with caffeine would be great. Thanks."

"Sure thing."

Scully turned back to MacCarthy, took the drape off his body. Reaching up, she turned on the recorder.

"Subject is male, Caucasian, 66 inches in extremis, weight 145 pounds ..."



tate Wildlife Refuge
Highway 10, Las Cruces, New
Mexico
3:56 p.m. MDT

After walking over miles and miles of hard-packed soil and the occasional outcrop of weathered sandstone, Mulder was damned glad that he'd decided to change into hiking boots. He was not looking forward to a close encounter of the painful kind with a sunning rattler. His forearms were a bit pink, since he'd forgotten to roll down his sleeves before venturing out in the sun.

Ahead of him, Jerry Doran walked beside the park ranger, wearing a canvas fishing cap that said, "If this hat's missin', I've gone fishin'." It's wide brim was warped and misshapen, a perfect testament to the man who wore it and his sense of humor. Sunlight glinted off a metallic fishing lure attached to the back of the hat.

The park ranger, Doherty, regaled them with his latest tale of poacher chasing, shifting the weight of a gym bag in his pudgy hands. He was a large man, gut threatening to burst out of his strained shirt and elastic waistband. The back of his neck was sunburned and leathery, the fuzz of hair on his head providing no protection from the sun's rays. He wore his ball cap on the back of his head, the plastic sizer in the back cradled between two large rolls of skin.

"Not that all of 'em are all that bad. Some of them folks are just out here camping overnight, and they pick up and leave early the next morning. I've run a few of the shanties outta here. Them that can't get a job in town usually end up shacking up on state ground, selling jewelry at roadside stands along the highway. But I keep tellin' 'em, they can't hunt the birds. Them's protected, I say."

Jerry clapped the ranger on the back. "You do a good job out here, Bobby."

Doherty pointed beyond a small hill. "If Drago's the guy you're lookin' for, he usually camps on the other side of that hill. He's been busted a coupla times for petty theft. Never knew him to rob the dead, though. He's, ah, kinda —" He twirled a finger around his temple. "Post traumatic stress, or somethin' like that. 'Nam did it to him."

Climbing the hill, Doherty took off his cap, waved it in the air. Mulder kept a hand close to his gun.

"Hey, Drago! You here? Got some people here who want to ask you some questions," Doherty hollered.

Standing on the crest of the hill, Mulder saw a small canvas pup tent hidden within an alcove of rocks. A stone fire pit stood a few feet away from the opening of the tent, with an old, battered pot standing under a small spit. A white tarp, similar to what Mulder had seen in the photo, served as sort of a bivouac. A man sat under it, legs crossed under him. The knees of his fatigues were worn through, and from what Mulder could see, the boots were in desperate need of resoling.

In the distance, Mulder saw the coyote from Blythe's pictures.

Drago held a wooden spear, and looked ready to throw it.

Doherty held up his arms, away from his sides, and told Jerry and Mulder to do the same. Mulder did so hesitantly, not wanting his hand to stray far from his gun.

"Drago, these are friends of mine," Doherty said, calmly walking down the hill. "They want to ask you a few questions."

Drago shook his head furiously. "Didn't do nothing!"

"We know you didn't do anything," Jerry assured, smiling wide. "We just want to ask you a few questions. Is that okay?"

Drago thought about it, then nodded. He stood awkwardly, stoop-shouldered. When he walked, there was a definitive limp in his gait. His left foot dragged behind him as if lame.

"Did you see anything happen here yesterday, Drago?" Jerry asked. "The police found three dead kids over near the rest stop."

"Had nothin' to do with that," Drago insisted. "Dead when Roscoe found 'em."

Mulder pointed toward the coyote, who now stood protectively on the ridge. "Is that Roscoe?"

Drago turned his head, smiled at the animal watching over him. "That's him. He protects me. Finds stuff for me."

Touching the white tarp, Mulder inquired, "Did he find this for you?"

"Yup. Yestedy mornin'. Over there." The direction he indicated was toward the rest stop.

"Did you know this was covering three dead kids, Drago?" Jerry questioned.

"Dead when I found them. I did nothin' to them kids."

Jerry took a step closer, but Drago held up his spear. Jerry stepped back. "We're not accusing you of anything. We just want to know if you saw anything. We don't think those kids were killed here. We think someone brought them here, left them in the parking lot. Did you see anything like that?"

Drago shook his head, started to fuss with his left ear. "Nothin'. I saw nothin'. I heard nothin' for days, 'cept that damned hum. It was loud a few days ago."

Mulder perked. "You heard humming?" Drago nodded.

Doherty leaned toward Mulder and whispered, "Drago says he can hear this hum. No one around here says they can hear it. We figure it must be somethin' left over from 'Nam."

Mulder ignored him. "Can you hear the hum now?"

"Always hear it." Drago squinted his eyes, fussed with his ear some more.

Mulder noticed a leather thong around his neck, with a ring hanging from it. "That's a nice piece of jewelry. May I see it?"

Drago stared down at his chest and pulled on the thin leather strip. "Can buy it for five bucks."

"Fair trade." Mulder pulled out his wallet and a five dollar bill.

Drago snatched the bill, stuffed it inside his shirt, and handed Mulder the leather thong. Mulder

was careful not to touch the ring itself. It was silver banded, with a heart in the center, topped by a large crown. Silvery hands held the heart. He slipped the makeshift necklace in a plastic bag.

"Do you think we can buy that tarp off you?" Mulder offered. He had no problem buying evidence, under the circumstances.

Drago looked at the tarp, fingered the material. "Trade. I need this. Need other things too."

Doherty asked, "What do ya want, Drago?"

Drago looked at Mulder's boots. "Them."

Mulder glanced at his feet. He was not exactly looking forward to traversing the terrain all the way back to the car in his socks.

"No problem, Drago. But this guy's got bigger feet than you do. How 'bout I get you a pair of your own?"

Drago pulled the tarp off the stakes it was tied to, handed it to Doherty. Doherty opened his gym bag and pulled out a pair of brand new work boots, which did happen to look a lot like the pair Mulder was wearing.

"Here ya go, Drago. And there's some soup in there for ya, too." Doherty stepped back as Drago rummaged through the gym bag. He told Mulder, "I always bring him a little somethin'. And I knew he was looking for boots."

Jerry put the tarp in a large plastic bag, tagged it, and started to walk off toward the car. Doherty was close behind when he turned, noticing that Mulder was not following. "Coming, Agent Mulder?"

"In a moment. I want to have a word with Drago here."

Drago looked up at the mention of his name.

Mulder knelt down, watched as Drago neatly stacked the cans of chicken soup on the ground. "How long have you heard the hum, Drago?"

"Forever."

"What does it sound like?"

As if looking for the words, Drago rolled his hands, tapped his good foot on the ground. "Buzzing. Bees buzzing."

"I don't here it, Drago."

"They say only certain people here it."

"They who?"

Drago pointed up to the sky. "Them."

Mulder looked up. "Aliens?"

"Them," Drago repeated, pointing up.

Doherty put his hand on Mulder's shoulder, indicated that they should leave. Mulder stood reluctantly, brushing his hands off on the seat of his pants.

When they were out of earshot, Doherty said, "The guy's nuts. Took a bullet in the head. Never been the same. Shoots rocks at the sky whenever a plane flies by. I knew him before the war, he went to school with my younger sister."

"Did he hear the hum before 'Nam?" Mulder inquired. Deep Throat came to mind. He had said that he'd had the distinction of being one of three men to kill an alien. It had been during the war, in Cambodia.

Doherty shrugged his shoulders. "Not so as I recall. I come out here evry' so often, bring him clothes and stuff. He tells me about the poachers."

"Does he ever claim the poachers came from outer space?"

Doherty looked at him strangely. Mulder was used to that expression. He got it from everybody, including his partner, when he brought up the extraterrestrial.

"I don't believe in no aliens, son. I don't know what Drago sees when he shoots at them planes, but it sure as hell ain't no alien spacecraft."

"Has he ever had a psychological evaluation? Maybe about the humming he hears?"

Doherty shoved his massive hands in his pants' pockets. "Listen, those people I see on them tabloid shows, the ones who claim to hear this

hum — I don't know what they're hearin'. I think it's a bunch of hogwash, people just looking for publicity."

"Maybe. Do you know the names of any of these Hummers?" Mulder asked. "I'd like to ask them a few questions."

"Not off the top of my head, but I can get some names, I suppose. What do you want them for?"

They were nearing the car. Mulder skipped ahead toward Jerry to help him with the tarp. "One of the kids murdered claimed he could hear the hum, too."



-Z Sleep Motel
Las Cruces, New Mexico
7:23 p.m. MDT

Scully looked up from her laptop computer when she heard the knock at the door. Uncoiling her legs, careful not to snag her sneakers on the bedspread, she got off the bed and peaked through the peephole. Mulder, freshly showered, stood on the other side. She unlocked the door, unhooked the chain, and let him in.

Mulder did not comment on the chain or the dead bolt. He knew she was still uneasy about leaving doors and windows unlocked, every since Duane Barry. Not that he blamed her. He himself had insisted that she get another lock put on her apartment door, even had reinforced windows put in place for her before she'd come home from the hospital.

"Hey, there's this neat Mom and Pop joint up the road. They've got apple pie. I'll even pay," he suggested, waggling his eyebrows a la Groucho Marx. "We could walk, it's not that far."

"I thought you had enough walking for today," she said, grabbing a light gray flannel shirt off the chair and stepping outside. She checked the doorknob to make sure it was locked.

"I'm too wired." He held up a piece of paper above her face, using his superior height to keep it just out of reach. "This was just faxed to me."

Scully dummy-punched him in the side, and his arm dropped.

"Ow," he whined, rubbing his ribs.

"You don't grow up being the shortest in the family without learning a few tricks." She quickly read through it, a little amazed at what was before her. "This is the toxicology report and chemistry on the liquid found in the victims' lungs. How did you get it?"

"Guess they got the rooms mixed up. Ten to one odds that the substance forensics finds on the tarp matches the liquid found in the victims' lungs."

"Mulder, these percentages — massive amounts of potassium chloride were found in their lungs. It looks like they inhaled a salt marsh."

"So maybe they accidentally fell in one and drowned."

Scully picked up her pace. His enthusiasm for a good argument was catching. "Mulder, the salts they mine in these parts are hundreds of feet below the earth's surface. What would three college students be doing in a salt mine?"

"Looking for something to go with their margarita mix?" he quipped.

"Then how did they get down there?"

"You haven't been watching *Earth 2*. Terrians do it all the time." Scully did not look amused. He shrugged. "I don't have all the answers."

Scully stopped, held up her hands. "Wait, I want that in writing."

Mulder heh-hehed, took her arm and steered her toward the diner.



After sopping up the rest of the ketchup on his plate with the last of Scully's french fries, Mulder popped them in his mouth, grinned, then dug into the slice of pie he'd ordered.

"Mulder, slow down, you're going to get a stomach ache," Scully warned. She leaned her back against the wall adjacent to the booth, feet propped up in front of her on the seat and knees drawn. "You're giving me a stomach ache just watching you."

In between bites, he managed to say, "I forgot to eat lunch. Besides, I think Mom and Pop over

there will be mighty displeased if they find your plate half-full."

Scully pushed the more than half-eaten burger away from her, not used to all the grease that came with it. Another bite and she thought she might throw up. She yawned, looked at her watch. It read 10:30, still on Washington time. Jet lag, she told herself.

Veering from that subject, Mulder asked, "So, what did you find out about the victims' friends at college?"

"There's a memorial service tomorrow night on campus. I got the names of the other students that lived in their house off campus. One has agreed to talk to us tomorrow morning."

"These friends have any idea where they went to Friday?"

Scully shook her head. "I don't know. I didn't ask."

Mulder nodded, inhaled the rest of the pie, then started in on the rest of Scully's burger. She looked away in comical distaste.

"I've got the name of someone else we should talk to: Harold Weinier," he said before taking a bite from the burger.

"Who's he?"

"A physicist employed by the DOE, noted researcher, and more importantly, a Hummer."

"You're kidding."

"I kid you not. That guy I told you about, Drago? He says he can hear the hum, and that it was really bad a few days ago."

"Mulder, what does this humming have to do with our case?" She took a sip of water, crunched the ice between her teeth.

"Drago implied that aliens are the cause of it. He was in Cambodia in 1968. And there were reported sightings of alien spacecraft hovering over various parts of Cambodia in 1968."

Scully quietly drummed the back of her head against the wall. "Okay, Mulder. We'll talk to

Weinier, but not because Drago says that aliens caused the humming. I'm not writing that in my field report."

"Whatever you say, Scully. Strictly professional consultation. Weinier runs a support group of sorts for people who hear the hum. He can give us some insight as to what these people are thinking. You never know, maybe it was the humming that led them to their deaths."

"I think you're reaching a bit there, Mulder."

"Only for my wallet."



ew Mexico State University
61 North Street
Las Cruces, New Mexico
Tuesday, May 16, 1995
9:46 a.m. MDT

The inside of the Victorian-styled house looked every bit as worn as the outside. Oak banisters lined the stairwell, hardwood floors looked like they had seen better days, and eggshell white paint on the walls was cracked and peeling. Multicolored beanbag chairs made up most of the furniture. Flags from around the world, including the Federation of Planets, were draped from the ceiling. The fish tank was stocked with beer. Nothing about the inside seemed to go with the times the house had been built to commemorate.

Eight-by-ten photos of college-aged students sat in frames nestled all along the plaster wall leading up the stairwell to the second floor. Some were portraits, others prank photos of parties, everyone gathered around the keg. A particular one caught Mulder's attention: All three victims were in it, arm in arm, a beautiful sunset as the backdrop. They were wearing climbing gear.

Eddie Joyner noticed his interest. "That was taken a year ago. Mac, Dave and Lynda loved to go climbing, hiking. You name it. Practically went every weekend."

"Do you know where they may have gone last Friday?" Scully asked, sitting across from Eddie in the living room.

"They said something about a cave Mac knows — knew. It's close by. Mac grew up around here. I've never been there, but I know where it is."

Mulder turned away from the photos. "Would Mac's parents know about this cave?"

"Sure. Mac's dad taught him how to climb. I could call them for you. They know me."

"Thanks, we'd appreciate it." Mulder pointed out a number of the photos on the wall. A number of them were of Eddie, suspended from ropes next to a giant stalactite. "So, you know a little about spelunking?"

Eddie cracked a smile. "I worked as one of the instructors in the Outdoor Club, along with Mac and Lynda. Dave wasn't too crazy about holes in the ground, though. I don't know how they managed to get him to go."

"How long were you friends, Eddie?" Scully inquired.

Eddie pulled his hand through his short, curly brown hair, rubbed his face in order to hide the fact that a few tears threatened to fall. "Ah, since freshmen year. We all lived in the same dorm. Me, Mac, Dave, Lynda, Tracy and Heather. Everyone called us the Brady Bunch. We, ah, moved here sophomore year." He shrugged his shoulders at the general disarray of the house. "Beats living in the dorms."

"Are the others around?"

"Ah, no. Tracy and Heather went home after graduation. They were too upset. I'm doing my grad work here, so I stayed."

Mulder took a seat next to Scully, extracted a plastic bag from his suit pocket. "Eddie, do you recognize this?" He held out the ring for the young man to see.

Eddie nodded. "Yeah, that's Mac's claddagh. It was a graduation present, high school, from his parents. He wore it everywhere. We had a bet that he would never wear the crown up before graduation."

"Crown up?" Mulder repeated.

Scully filled him in. "It's a traditional Irish wedding band. You wear the crown up if you're taken, crown down if you're not."

Eddie fingered the ring, stared at the heart and hand combination. His hand went to a piece of string he had around his neck. There was a shark's tooth attached to it. "Mac had this necklace, like this one. He had a piece of Connemara marble on it. He said it brought him good luck."

When he offered to hand back the ring, Mulder closed his hand around it. "No, keep it. Give it to his parents." Eddie nodded.

A phone started ringing. Mulder's hand collapsed over his inside breast pocket. "Excuse me." He pulled out the cellular phone and hit the talk button, walked to the other side of the room. "Mulder ... yeah, Jerry, we're just about finished here ... we'll be right there."

"What's going on?" Scully stood.

"There was a four-car pile up about an hour ago. No fatalities, but one of the victims claimed to hear a hum just before the crash," Mulder explained.

"Mac used to say he could hear a hum every once in a while. We all thought he was playing with our heads. He was always quoting some nonsense, playing with conspiracy theories. He could quote *JFK* verbatim, beginning to end."

Mulder shook Eddie's hand. "Thanks for your help. Here's where we're staying. Our cellular numbers are on there, too. Call us anytime, day or night."

"I will. Hey, if you're planning on going down in that cave, I can get you down there. Anything to help figure out why this happened."

"Thanks. We may take you up on that."

Eddie led them to the door.

"M"ulder, you haven't said a word since we left the house," Scully commented as she changed lanes. There was very little traffic on the highway. As far as she was concerned, a low traffic day was about all she could handle. She stifled a yawn, shook her head to clear the cobwebs. Tossing and turning all night had not put her in the best of moods.

Mulder chewed on his seeds. "I'm thinking."

"I can see that. Smoke is practically spilling from your ears."

"I checked Thomas MacCarthy's file with the Center for UFO Activities last night. He only heard the hum some of the time. I asked the college to fax me a copy of his medical records. At age six weeks, he contracted bacterial meningitis. It was treated with streptomycin after conventional antibody therapy failed. Streptomycin has been known to cause intermittent ringing in the ears."

Scully looked over at him. He stared out the window, into the sideview mirror. "No extraterrestrial explanations? No extreme possibilities? You were actually looking for a plausible, scientific reason for Tom MacCarthy's ear-ringing? Are you feeling all right? Because something must be wrong with you if you've come over to the other side."

"Momentary mental aberration. It won't happen again, especially with this morning's accident. If anything, it proves that there is some outside source responsible for the humming."

"If you say aliens, I'm going to scream."

"Let me get my earplugs."

Scully slugged him in the thigh. Rubbing the tender area, Mulder sat up a little straighter, and slid farther across the seat.

"It was only a suggestion," he grumbled playfully.

"Think of another. Maybe there is a downed transformer somewhere in the area of the accident. It was rush hour. People are a little crazed during rush hour."

"Yeah, I've seen you on the turnpike."

"Don't make me hurt you, Mulder. You're the one with the speeding tickets."

"Sorry. I apologize. Okay, we'll check out the scene, see if there is any reasonable cause for a four car pile up. Then we look to the realm of extreme possibility."

Scully's brow furrowed, suspicious. "Why are you being so placating?"

"Me?" he asked in wounded surprise. "Placate? I just don't want to get hit again. You've picked up a mean streak, Ms. Scully. What would your mother say?"

"Bill, leave your sister alone'."

"Must be nice to be Mom's favorite."

Scully smiled, and turned off the highway.



**oute 67 Accident Scene
Outside Las Cruces, New
Mexico
10:22 a.m. MDT**

Two cars were wrapped around each other's fenders near the shoulder of the road. A tow truck had a third riding on the back, its driver's side folded at midsection. The fourth car, a huge '79 Plymouth Volare, had minor rear bumper damage. Its occupant was seated on the fender of the nearest cop car, receiving first aid for a cut about his left eye.

Three ambulances had responded to the scene. State troopers directed traffic to the other side of the highway near one of the meridians so that the investigative team could reconstruct the physics of the accident.

Scully slowed as she neared one of the troopers, flashed her ID, and was directed to park over on the shoulder, approximately fifty feet behind the scene. Mulder was out of the car before she had turned it off, and hunted down the officer in charge. Scully trotted after him.

The officer in charge met them halfway. "You FBI?"

"Agent Mulder." He offered his ID, then thumbed at the person behind him. "Agent Scully."

"Deputy Mike Vasile." He shook their hands, gruffly and quickly.

"What have you got, Deputy?" Mulder asked, pocketing his ID.

Vasile pointed at the blue Volare station wagon, and led them in its direction. "Our driver over there lost control of his car momentarily and slammed on the brakes. Driver number two in the red Jetta got turned around to avoid hitting the Volare, only to be plowed into by driver number



three and passenger in the maroon Golf. Driver number four in the tan sedan slammed into the back of the Golf. Sandwich city."

"Any casualties?" Scully asked, using her hand to block the glare of the sun off the road and broken glass. No one seemed to be in a hurry around the ambulances. Anyone who had been seriously hurt had already been taken to the hospital.

"The Jetta has a broken leg, possible concussion. She's been taken to Memorial Hospital. Volare'll probably need a few stitches to close the cut above his eye. Golf had an airbag, minor concussion, maybe whiplash. Sedan should be okay. They're all still here, if you want to talk to them."

"Any idea how this happened?" Mulder inquired. He took in the scene with a detached sense of curiosity. The power company had a truck across the road. The fire truck dispatched to the scene was revving its engine to leave, its job done. Another pair of tow trucks had arrived, along with a long flatbed to take care of the damaged cars.

Vasile scratched his head, pulled the brim of his cap down closer to his eyes. He did not look happy at answering endless questions. "As far as my men can tell, the Volare slipped on the roadway, about one hundred feet back. It stopped close to that meridian, then was propelled here by the impact of the other three cars."

"What might have caused the car to slip? These Plymouths are like tanks. I didn't see any water or oil on the road surface."

Mulder knelt down beside the rear tire well. Taking a coin from his pocket, he estimated the depth of the tread on the radials to be about a centimeter. "These tires are fairly new. It's kind of hard to believe that they would just skid out from underneath. The length of the skid marks seems to indicate that the driver wasn't going over 40 mph, at most 50, when the accident occurred."

"The driver claimed he saw a bright flash and heard a humming noise just before the incident," Vasile stated. "The power company sent out a crew to check the transformers along the roadside."

Scully stepped forward before Mulder could suggest that they look in a more heavenly

direction for their cause. "Can we speak with the driver, please?"

Vasile shot out his arm in a gesture that said "be my guest."

Mulder followed her, leaned near her ear. "You missed my grand finale."

"What, where you say that Reticulans left behind some inconspicuous alien device in an effort to take over our galaxy, or where the sheriff runs you out of town for inciting a riot because of government conspiracy?"

Scully stopped, leaned a hand against the top of the station wagon. She lowered her voice when it became obvious that a number of police officers were looking their way. "This area is already hotter than a hornet's nest about the radiation tests that went on during the '40s and '50s. The National Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments is supposed to file their report soon, including reparations to the families of all the miners and prisoners and patients that were exposed, which we both know won't amount to anything substantial. They don't need another exposure of the government's dirty little secrets, real or imagined."

She stalked off, but Mulder caught her shoulder before she could get very far. He noticed that her eyes were puffy from lack of sleep. "Didn't get much shut-eye again last night, did you?"

"No," she answered quietly. She looked away from him.

"You know you can always talk to me."

"It's nothing. Jet lag. This is not like Minnesota, Mulder. I'm fine." She smiled, no hint of trepidation. "Really."

"You look a little pale."

"Really, I'm fine."

Mulder took his hand off her shoulder and walked beside her toward the paramedics.

The driver was holding an ice pack to his forehead, sipping water from a paper cup. He looked up at the agents' arrival, and gave the paramedic the empty cup.

"Guess I caused a bit of a mess," he said, removing the ice pack. A nasty gash crossed his forehead from the left eyebrow to his temple, bloody, but not very deep. "Murray Nash, contractor."

Mulder opened his ID for the man and introduced himself and Scully.

"Can I ask you what you were doing before the accident, Mr. Nash?" he requested, replacing his ID. Behind Nash, Scully was reading the accident report the paramedics had recorded.

"Just driving to work. I heard this really strange hum, and the next thing I knew, there was a flash of light and my car was spinning out of control. I don't really know what happened. It was so fast."

"Have you had any alcohol in the past six hours?"

"No, never touch the stuff. Messes with my ulcer."

Mulder looked to Scully, knowing she had checked his Breathalyzer results on the report. She nodded; Nash was telling the truth.

"About what time did the accident occur? In your best estimation?"

Nash leaned against the back wall of the paramedic truck he sat in order to stretch his legs. His jeans were torn at the knee, another injury incurred during the accident. "8:45. I checked my watch just before it happened." Nash pulled the time piece out of his shirt pocket, frowned at the cracked face. "It was my daddy's. It's busted now."

Mulder looked at the time it said. 8:59. "This reads almost nine o'clock." Scully looked at him, incredulous. Time loss. "Are you sure about the time?"

"Oh, yeah. I always set my watch 15 minutes ahead to keep me on time. Not that it always works. My eyes see nine o'clock, but my brain says quarter to."

Handing the watch back to him, Mulder dropped his theory of time loss.

Across the highway, a number of men in blue hard hats returned with a singed piece of metal. They were calling to their supervisor, who was talking

with Deputy Valise. Mulder and Scully waited to hear their report.

"Blown transformer, 200 yards in. Power's out in this grid."

Scully turned back to the truck and said, "Guess that blows your Reticulan theory out of the water."

Mulder didn't justify the quip with a comment.

"Thank you for your time, Mr. Nash," Mulder said, shaking his hand. He walked off toward their rental car, first stopping off to thank Deputy Vasile for his help and to request a copy of the accident report.

Scully caught up with him near the driver's side door. "So, now what? It was a transformer, like I said."

"This time, Scully. There wasn't a power outage reported last Friday, and there are no transformers near the Highway 10 rest stop. Drago heard a loud hum on Friday." He checked his pockets. "Do you have the keys?"

"Drago probably suffers from post traumatic stress. Tittinius is a common phenomenon with psychological disorders of that nature." She tossed him the keys and walked around the back of the car to the passenger side.

"Then why would the hum be any louder on Friday? Why not yesterday, or two weeks from last Thursday? There's a connection there, Scully, and those kids' deaths have something to do with it."

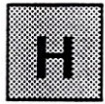
They opened the doors together and got in the car. Mulder turned the key, fastened his seat belt.

"Where are we going?" Scully rolled down her window, put on her sunglasses.

Mulder drove through the meridian to get to the other side of the highway, and headed out of the city. "To see Harold Weinier. I want his take on this."

"Do you think he heard the hum Friday?"

"We'll find out, won't we?"



Home of Dr. Harold Weinier
 Deming, New Mexico
 1:05 p.m. MDT

Harold Weinier carried a tray topped with a tea pot and three cups into his living room. He was in his early forties. A tuft of brown hair still adorned the top of his head, slowly losing the battle with his retreating hairline. His upper body seemed out of proportion to his legs, as his arms seemed thicker than his calves. Sitting on a low table near his reading chair was a pile of magazines. Back issues of *Science*, *Nature*, *Physics Today* and *Scientific American* were displayed in various forms of disarray; pages folded down, covers displaced, small pieces of paper serving as bookmarks in several of them. Newspapers that probably dated back several weeks were on the other side of the chair. Trinkets populated the mantle and shelf space, as well as volumes upon volumes of text books and journals that seemed to have absolutely no order, except for the person who had placed them there.

Scully and Mulder sat on the low-slung couch and graciously accepted their cups of tea. Weinier pulled over a padded footstool, letting the cat that he displaced crawl over his legs until it found a warm place to nuzzle. Seemingly satisfied with Weinier's lap, the cat nestled down, forelegs draped over Weinier's arm.

Weinier petted the cat affectionately. "Don't mind Maxwell. He has a mind of his own," the physicist explained, worming his arm out from under his furry companion.

"Maxwell, as in Maxwell's equations?" Scully suggested. She kept her hands wrapped tightly around the warm tea cup. Despite the heat outside, the house was extremely cool, the forced air system working to keep the house at about 60 degrees.

"Not many people would catch that," Weinier stated, stroking the cat when it decided to claw at his thigh.

"I have a BS in Physics," Scully admitted. "Quantum mechanics and particle physics."

"A glutton for punishment, I see." Weinier smiled. "To answer your question, though, he was named for Maxwell Smart. *Get Smart* was one of my favorite TV shows. And Fuzzball here always seems completely unaware of the trouble he

causes. But, I do have two dogs outside named Photon and Quark, if you were expecting some strangely neurotic physicist thing."

"May I ask what your specialty is?" Mulder took an obligatory sip of tea, then placed the cup down. He was not a big fan of herbal blends, especially not hot ones.

"Nuclear physics. In this part of the country, it's hard to escape the field. I used to teach over at the State University. Currently I work for the Department of Energy. They've called me in to do some work on the Yucca Mountain project, and a few others in this area. Mostly environmental concerns. I'm what you might call a token lecturer. I explain to the masses that what is being done is not dangerous or harmful if the technology is respected. That job has become much harder since the President authorized the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments to hear testimony from the hundreds of people affected by the quote-unquote 'cult of conspiracy' during the Cold War."

Mulder leaned forward on his knees, cupping his hands together. "Well, we're not here to investigate your part in that, rest assured. As I told you on the phone yesterday, we're more interested in the Hummers."

Weinier nodded. "I hope my credentials will keep you from casting any doubt on me concerning this subject."

"Can you hear the hum now?" Scully asked.

"I always hear it. Some days, it is worse than others. I've learned to tune it out."

"What do you think is the cause for the hum?"

Weinier's cat decided to jump off his owner's lap at that point, and headed for Mulder's shins. Weinier caught Maxwell before he could deposit a load of cat hair on Mulder's pant leg, and gently tossed him into the arm chair.

"Sorry," he apologized, returning his attention to Scully. "What was that you asked?"

"The cause of the hum?"

Weinier stood and walked over to an old roll-top desk. From under mounds of paper, he retrieved

a device that looked a lot like a tape recorder and microphone attached to a portable oscilloscope. "I have been able to record the hum using this. After a little filtering with the equipment I have downstairs, you can hear it now, too."

He popped the tape into his stereo and played it. Sure enough, there was a very subtle buzz coming from the speakers.

"Everything has a natural vibration," Weinier continued.

"How so?" Mulder asked.

"The next time you're in a public bathroom, Agent Mulder, try humming at different pitches, different frequencies. After a while, the sound vibrations you create will be in phase with the natural vibrations of the metal stalls, causing an amplification affect. In essence, you will be in tune with the bathroom."

"Sounds very Zen-like."

"Physics and Zen have a lot of things in common."

"So, you believe something is causing a natural vibration somewhere to be amplified?" Mulder suggested. "Of what? The bedrock?"

"Or something in the bedrock."

"Like what?"

"That, I don't know. Or what might be the source of the amplification effect."

"Then, why do only some people hear this hum?" Mulder inquired, pointing to the tape that was still playing in the stereo.

Scully set down her tea cup. "Different people respond differently to different auditory stimuli."

"But these frequencies are within the hearing capabilities of dogs," Mulder reasoned. "I don't hear Photon barking up a storm."

"I have an explanation for that one, Agent Mulder," Weinier offered. "Photon is sixteen years old. His hearing isn't what it used to be. But that doesn't mean he can't smell a peanut butter sandwich at twenty paces." Weinier laughed and turned off the tape. "May I ask why you're so interested?"

Mulder pulled two pictures from his shirt pocket. "These two people have made claims that they can hear the hum. The young man, Thomas McCarthy, was found dead Sunday morning. The older gentleman, Vincent Drago, is a transient who temporarily resides near the rest stop where McCarthy and two of his friends were found. The three students are believed to have died sometime Friday afternoon. Mr. Drago says that the hum that he hears was more intense that afternoon."

"If you're going to ask if I heard a louder hum on Friday, I'm afraid I have to say no. I was away last week at a symposium in New York. I had just stepped in the door when you called me yesterday, Agent Mulder."

"Could the hum cause the eardrum to rupture if exposed to an intense-enough dose?"

Weinier was taken aback by the question. "The hum can be annoying, but it certainly hasn't killed anyone, not to my knowledge. The victims' eardrums were ruptured?"

Scully nodded.

"Would you be willing to go accompany us to the murder site?" Mulder requested. "We believe the site where the bodies were found was not the site of the murder. We are tracking down leads on where they might have gone Friday. Friends have said that they went spelunking. I'd like to see if you can detect the hum wherever they were murdered."

"Just tell me when and where. I'll have my gear ready. I haven't been spelunking in a long time."



ou actually think that the hum killed those three students?" Scully asked as they returned to their car. Mulder didn't seem to hear her.

Something else caught his attention. Lying on the hood of the car was a small wire-haired fox terrier, with her belly toward the sun.

"I think we have a stowaway." Mulder stared at the dog, watched as her stubby tail wagged merrily along, oblivious to their approach.

"Makes a cute hood ornament," Scully said, walking to the passenger door. The dog did not move when she opened it.

Weinier stepped out onto his porch, a box of dog biscuits held in his hand. He shook the box once. The dog's head turned in the direction of the familiar noise.

"Quark! Here, Quark." Weinier shook the box again. The dog jumped off the hood and yipped at Weinier's ankles. Weinier picked up the dog and tossed her into the house playfully. "Sorry about that."

Mulder waved goodbye and checked for scratches in the paint. "You were saying?"

"You think the hum killed those students."

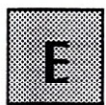
"I think it's a possibility, one we can't overlook."

"Why, Mulder? The cause of death was drowning. That's abundantly clear."

Mulder started the car, let it idle until he felt it safe to start the air conditioning without overloading the electrical system. "But what's not clear is how did they get into a pool of potassium chloride? Someone or something had to draw them to the site of the actual murder."

"So where are we going now?"

Mulder eyes were lit with puerile charm. "I want to try out that bathroom trick."



**-Z Sleep Motel
Las Cruces, New Mexico
Wednesday, May 17, 1995
10:26 a.m. MDT**

Mulder leaned against the back board of his bed, tennis ball in hand. He balanced it on the back of his hand, rolling it up and down his wrist. He bounced it against the wall that separated his and Scully's room again, as he had for the past half hour.

He had let her sleep in, having sabotaged her alarm clock, even let himself have a few extra hours of down time. Scully needed the rest. He knew she knew it, even if she wouldn't admit it. He considered himself an expert on insomnia, and how it cropped up at the most inconvenient times. Now his partner was part of the insomniacs club,

not of her own choosing. After Minnesota, she was a little more open with him about what she was thinking, what was bothering her. But not much. She still bottled a lot of it inside.

For better or worse, Duane Barry had changed their relationship. He knew he was part of the reason why she had been abducted. They'd been close friends before; he trusted her explicitly, and she had said the same of him. When she'd disappeared, all the old feelings of helplessness and anxiety had returned. He'd been twelve years old again, paralyzed by fear, unable to sleep, not willing to give up. Only, Scully had been returned to him.

In many ways, she had taken the place of Samantha in his life. And if she thought he was placating her, being overprotective, so be it. Anything was better than the guilt he'd felt when she'd been taken away.

He bounced the ball off the ceiling a few times, then returned to tossing it against the wall. He continued to do so even when Scully knocked and walked into his room, clad in T-shirt and jeans. Her hair was tied up in a ponytail, still wet from the shower. She watched as he targeted the wall and hit it just above the mirror.

Cocking an eye at him, she carefully ducked under the flying tennis ball in order to get to the table across the room.

"I was wondering what that noise was, because by your own admission, you don't know what a girl is."

"Did I wake you?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

"Good. I didn't think I could sneak into your room to turn the alarm back on."

Scully let her head fall back in mock laughter. She took a seat in the room's only chair and propped her feet up on the end of the bed. Mulder was glad to see that she was in better spirits today. Her gaze fell on two pieces of pink paper sitting on the table.

Printed across the top were the words, "While you were out." In neat, flowing script, two phone messages were written out with day and time of

call. One was from Eddie Joyner, the other from Bobby Doherty.

She held up the message from Doherty. "Who's this?"

"Park ranger. He called to tell me that Drago's gone missing. Packed up his tent and coyote and left town. Since I had such a nice rapport with the man, Doherty thought I would like to know."

"What do you think happened?" Scully asked.

"I think he went for higher ground. Three deaths in the area would frighten any vagrant." Mulder threw the tennis ball against the ceiling. "I don't know. I hope he left because he wanted to leave."

"What does Eddie have to say?"

"That he thinks he knows where MacCarthy, Simpson and Schneider went last Friday."

"Where?"

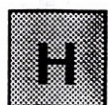
"A place about twenty-five miles from here. Apparently, Dave Schneider was not a fan of deep dark places. This one cave is supposedly lit from the inside by some bioluminescent algae. As a biology major, I guess he couldn't resist."

"I take it you want to check this place out," Scully said, taking her feet off the bed.

Mulder stood and slipped on his sneakers, leaving the laces untied. "First, breakfast. Then, we go exploring." He pulled a piece of paper from his back pocket. "Eddie gave me the directions to this place. I told him to meet us at one o'clock. I also gave Dr. Weinier a call, and gave him Eddie's number so they can collaborate. Weinier is going to join us as well, maybe take a few measurements while he's down there."

"Looks like you've covered all the bases."

"All we have to do know is figure out who's on first."



anover Cavern
Outside Las Cruces, New
Mexico
1:03 p.m. MDT

Mulder pulled up next to the blue pick-up, its owner perched on the tailgate, a box sitting in his

lap. Dust and dirt curled in eddy currents around his feet as Mulder stepped out of the car. He put a hand up to shade his eyes, using the other to pad his shirt pocket for the sunglasses he suspected he forgot.

Dr. Weinier looked up from the box of gizmos and smiled, eyes hidden behind a pair of mirrored sunglasses. "Beautiful day, isn't it?"

A travelling dust cloud marked the arrival of the last of their group. A jeep that had seen better days came to a screeching halt about ten feet from the red sedan. Eddie grabbed a large duffle from the passenger seat and climbed out, wiping dust and sweat from his eyes and forehead as he walked.

"I brought the extra gear you asked for, Dr. Weinier."

"Thank you, Eddie."

Mulder leaned over the side of the truck bed and peaked under a cardboard box topped with a large blue tinted solar panel. A small hourglass twirled in the center of the laptop's screen. Scopes, meters and gadgets he didn't know littered the back of the pick-up.

"I thought you said you wanted to take a few measurements," Mulder said, holding up a roll of cables and adapters.

"Just the essentials, Agent Mulder. Don't want to do a haphazard job, do I?"

"You actually intend to use all of this stuff?" Mulder picked up a white rectangular unit, the only piece of equipment he recognized. He turned it on, moved the aerial into position. "We're going underground. You can't use a GPS unit in a cave if you want any sort of accuracy."

"But we can use it to narrow down our scope, if we ever hope to find this place again."

Even behind the sunglasses, Mulder knew Eddie's eyes were wide in awe as the young man stared at the laptop. "Is this the new Powerbook with the pentium chip? What's the operating speed? How much hard disk space? What's the efficiency of the solar panel hook-up?" Eddie spouted questions faster than a rushing geyser.

"All in good time," Weinier stated. "But let's get down to business, shall we?" He pulled the lap top closer; box, solar panel and all.

"I've been here since eleven this morning taking readings with some of my equipment," he continued, patting a small black box near his knee. "This is what I've found."

Weinier double clicked on a graphics icon and retrieved the first of three files depicted in the graphics folder. A two dimensional graph of voltage versus time appeared.

"Anyone care to interpret?"

Standing over Scully's shoulder, Eddie spoke. "There doesn't seem to be a pattern, just sort of sporadic bursts."

Grinning, Weinier shook his head. "Ah, but there is a pattern." He double clicked on the second file. A companion graph, this time frequency versus time, overlapped the lower right corner of the first graph. A definite pattern could be seen.

"It's cycling through a frequency range," Scully noted, tracing the sinusoidal pattern on the computer screen. "Three times in the last hour."

A third graph appeared along the bottom of the screen with a third dimension of amplitude added to the frequency versus time graph. With all the hills and valleys in the graph, Mulder thought it looked more like a nightmarish golf course than an energy distribution.

"The signal is sporadic. Stray voltage is intermittent and off the scale at times." Weinier closed each file, then idled the computer to sleep mode. "I think that whatever it is, it is on its last legs."

"Do you think this signal is caused by some sort of machine?" Scully asked, folding her arms across her chest.

Weinier nodded. "Of what nature, I'm not sure. But nothing else in nature gives off signals like this. It has to be man-made."

"Or something like that," Mulder quipped under his breath. Only Scully heard him, and in response just gave him a patented Scully look-of-scorn. He just smiled and shrugged his

shoulders. He turned his attention back to Weinier. "You said we could narrow our search. How?"

Weinier handed him another small box-like piece of equipment with a long antennae. "ELF Magnetometer. As indicated by the energy distribution I just showed you, a majority of the spectrum analysis lies in the 10-50 Hz range. This thing will pick it up."

"Eddie, where are we in relation to the cave your friends were in?" Scully asked, scanning the horizon for any other tunnel entrances.

Eddie turned around slowly, gathering his bearings. Stopping, he pointed to another hill a ways off. "Couple hundred feet to the west. It's easier to get in here, though. That's why I told Agent Mulder to meet here."

Weinier handed Eddie the GPS unit Mulder handled earlier. "Eddie, know how to use this?"

Nodding, Eddie walked towards an open area away from the cars.

Weinier started rummaging through the equipment in his pick-up again. "I would have liked to get a gravimeter out here, but I couldn't get one on short notice. But, we can still map any equipotential surfaces this thing is creating. The voltage spikes may be sporadic, but we can still map them out. The largest bursts of stray voltage will probably be the center of the bullseye."

Handing both him and Scully gray boxes that looked like they were pitched together with bailing wire and bubble gum, Weinier showed them how to operate them. "Battery operated multimeter, with probe attachments that's I've put together. After we find the approximate center of the frequency bursts, we'll map a square grid, one hundred feet by one hundred feet. Readings every five feet or so, then we'll plot it up on my lap top, hopefully pinpoint the center of the anomaly."

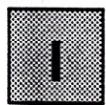
An hour and a half later, Weinier pointed to an area on the laptop screen.

GPS – Global Positioning Satellite System; ELF
– Extra Low Frequency

"Somewhere under this spot is the origin of the hum. To the west."

Doing a quick mental calculation, Mulder oriented himself with respect to the map and the terrain surrounding them.

"Where our three victims were spelunking."



Inside Hanover Cavern
25 miles outside Las Cruces,
New Mexico
2:44 p.m. MDT

The beam from Scully's Mag-Lite bounced off the floor near Mulder's feet. It was tied to the side of her backpack so that she could keep her hands free when it came time to repel down to the cavern below. She had gone repelling once in her life, and vowed never to do it again. It had not been a pleasant experience, wrought with blisters and a twisted ankle that still bothered her when the weather was just right.

She had fallen behind a few feet when she stopped to tie back her hair once more. Mulder waited for her, shining his flashlight just below her face so that he would not blind her. With a nod of her head, she silently sent a signal that he did not have to wait. He tripped over his feet getting back on track.

Weinier was up ahead, talking animatedly with Eddie Joyner, as only a professor would do. Eddie happily answered his questions, asked a few of his own about opportunities in graduate school and the job market with various degrees. Scully remembered having a similar conversation with an anthropology professor at the University of Maryland. He had tried to steer her away from the physics department early on, similar to what Weinier was trying to do with Eddie right now, only to physics instead of away. She had trusted that professor's opinion more than her own advisor's when it had come to career options.

She caught up with the rest of the group easily. They were near the lip of the cavern entrance. Eddie was planting anchors in the rock, checking the safety harnesses and all the ropes. He tossed everyone a helmet for safety.

"Okay, this is real simple. The floor is only about 90 down. This slope is easier than the one Mac and Lynda would have taken, but I can get us over there once we're on the ground," Eddie

announced, tying a rope around the loops of his pack. He sent it over the edge.

Eddie checked and double-checked everyone's harness, the ropes, the anchors. Once he was satisfied they had taken appropriate precautions, he flung his rope over the lip.

"I'll go first. Agent Mulder, you come next, then Agent Scully, and then Dr. Weinier."

Mulder looked over the rim. "I hope there's an easier way to get back up."

"There is, but it's a bit of a hike from here, and you can't get to that entrance by car. It's fastest to get at it through the tunnels, and then hike down the rest of the way."

"Lay on, MacDuff," Mulder said, stepping back from the edge.

Eddie dropped over the side.

Scully took a deep breath, unease setting in. A headache threatened to throb behind her eyes. She paced around in small circles, careful not to tangle her ropes.

"Hey, Scully." Mulder touched her shoulder, startling her. "You okay?"

She rubbed her hands together, fidgety. Mulder grabbed them, steadied her hands. "Phantom blisters," she said with a half-faked smile. "I'm okay."

"You sure? You didn't eat much this morning, and you didn't touch your lunch." Mulder brushed away stray bangs from her forehead, then noticed her earlobe. "Your ear is awfully red."

Instinctively, Scully put a hand to her ear. It was warm to the touch. She tugged at her earlobe. "I must be coming down with something."

"You still want to do this?"

"Yes." Scully stepped forward, looked over the side. Eddie touched ground and was waiting for Mulder to start his descent. "It's your turn, Mulder."

Mulder eased himself over the side, not taking his eyes off Scully until safety reasons forced him to do so. He landed without mishap.

Scully took in another deep breath then dropped over herself. She went slowly, not wanting to twist an ankle again. When she set down, she let out the breath she had been holding. Mulder was instantly at her side, helping her out of the harness. By the time she was free, Weinier was on the ground and shimmying out of his gear.

Eddie packed up the ropes and the harnesses, dividing the load between his and Mulder's packs. Weinier knelt down to unpack his portable recorder, and tested it to make sure it was working. Mulder stood over his shoulder, watched the needle move back and forth as Weinier played with the gain.

"Can you hear the hum now, Dr. Weinier?"

Weinier looked over his shoulder at Mulder's expectant face. "Yes. It's a little louder than usual. When I get back to my lab, I can compare what I pick up today with what I have on file."

"Are you sure that thing's recording?"

"Very sure. Agent Mulder, I know what I'm doing," Weinier assured him.

Scully slipped out of her backpack to get at the camera she had stashed in it. She checked the flash, took a light reading. Pictures would probably be dark, even with the flash. Playing with the f-stop helped a little, but not much.

"Ready, Scully?" Mulder walked up beside her, hefting his backpack over his right shoulder.

"Yeah." She picked up her pack, slung it over her shoulder. She carried the camera around her neck. "Let's go."

Eddie unfolded the rudimentary map that they had drawn while topside and headed for one of several tunnels that he thought would lead them in the right direction. Running his hand along the walls, he said, "This whole area is underlain by calcium carbonate deposits. Acidic water gets in, dissolves away the rock and leaves this behind."

"What about the salt deposits?" Mulder asked. "How close are we to them?"

"Oh, about three, four hundred feet below us. But there are a few lenses here and there. Wouldn't recommend any for your french fries, though. Sylvite is bitter as hell."

"What did you say your major was, Eddie?"

"Geology."

Mulder snapped his fingers. "That's what I thought you said. What's causing the pinkish red color in the rocks? I thought limestone was gray and dull."

Eddie laughed. "In Washington D.C., it probably is. Here, the coloration is probably due to some trace element stain. Maybe potassium, more than likely it's iron. A lot of these units are Triassic, Jurassic in age. Lots of red beds were deposited then."

A few hundred feet in, the tunnel opened into a larger cave. From where Scully stood, she could see three ropes hanging from above. Three backpacks were piled on the other side. Eddie ran over to one of them, a bright orange pack with ink writing all over it. He stopped, knelt down, felt the coarse fabric.

Slowly, almost choked, he said, "This is Mac's. They were here."

Scully turned on the flash, and removed the lens cap from the camera. Stepping over to where the backpacks were laid, she scoured the area with her eyes for any other clues. It was hard to see in the darkened cave. The lanterns left behind by previous hikers did not provide a lot of illumination. Mulder shined his flashlight all around the room.

"Flashing," Scully announced, taking a round of pictures. She took a few of the ropes as well, to be on the safe side.

"Hey, Scully, take a look at this."

Mulder waved her over toward another tunnel entrance, where he knelt beside something lying in the dirt. With a pencil, he picked up a piece of cloth.

"Looks like a handkerchief," she said, taking a picture after Mulder put it back on the ground. "There are some plastic bags in my pack." She shucked off the straps and handed it to him.

Mulder placed the 'kerchief in a plastic bag, tagged it with a felt tip pen. "Eddie." He held up the bag for him to see. "Recognize this?"

Eddie took the bag, studied its contents. "Lynda."

"Mulder, I see footprints, about four feet from where you are standing." Scully walked around them carefully. "Two sets, maybe three, heading west." She took pictures of the footprints as well, kneeling down to zoom in as much as possible and still get a decent shot.

When she stood, she was overcome by a wave of dizziness, almost nausea. Mulder noticed the halt in her step, and took her elbow to steady her.

"You okay?"

Scully swallowed the bile that burned the back of her throat, closed her eyes. "I stood up too fast."

"Maybe you are coming down with something," Mulder suggested. "Look, we can go on without you, if you want to rest —"

"I'm fine. When we get back to the car, I'll take some aspirin." She shivered involuntarily and wished she had thought to bring something a little warmer to wear. She nodded toward the tunnel. "Let's go."

Mulder nodded, concern still marring his features. He herded the rest of the team toward the entrance. "Okay, we go in."

Water splashed everywhere as they traversed through the stream. Soaked to the knee, Scully stopped trying to find rocks to step on and joined Eddie and Mulder in the stream itself. Weinier did the same. The waterlogged boots were nothing compared to the sight of glowing plantlife along the stream's bank, though.

"Any spikes, Doctor?" Mulder asked, holding his flashlight on the oscilloscope's screen.

Weinier shook his head. "Not since we've begun."

Eddie turned around, flashlight bobbing on the walls and water. "I think I hear a waterfall ahead. Better watch your step. Things could get a little slippery."

"Mulder, take a look at this."

Scully was kneeling near the bank of the stream. In her hands, she held a strand of glowing seaweed. As Mulder shined his flashlight on it, the glow dissipated, and the strand seemed to shrink in size.

She held up several other strands along the bank. "I noticed these when you were talking with Dr. Weinier. The glow disappeared when your flashlight hit it."

Mulder pulled a plastic sandwich bag from his shirt pocket. "Get a sample. I want to have that tested." She opened up her pocketknife and cut several strands.

As Mulder turned, a flat piece of rock slipped from underneath his boot. When he tried to regain his balance, he overcompensated and twisted awkwardly to avoid falling in the water. A hiss of pain escaped his lips as he grabbed his knee with both hands.

"What is it, Mulder?" Scully stuffed the plastic bag and knife in her back pocket and slipped under his arm to help support his weight. She led him to the side wall and leaned him against it. Without being told, Weinier held his flashlight so that she could see the affected area.

Mulder hobbled in order to keep his balance. "I think I twisted my knee." He tried to move, and grimaced with pain.

"Can you bend it?" Scully tried to ease his leg up, and he moaned softly with the pain. "This is going to swell." She looked around her. There was no place for him to sit. To top that, she didn't have a proper first aid kit to help ease the pain. "Well, I could have you sit here in the water. It's cold enough to keep down the swelling a bit." Mulder groaned. "I can see you're not happy with that option."

"I can walk," he said. "Anything is better than wet boxers."

"Avoiding wet boxers is what got you into this mess."

"It's only a little bit further to the next cavern," Eddie called back, nearing the lip of the waterfall. "We can find a place to put him down."

Mulder stopped his forward motion, looking around him. "Did you hear that?"

Scully turned about, trying to find her bearings. "Something is buzzing."

Looking at the scope of his instrument, Weinier's expression soured. "There is something definitely happening. Long wavelength pulse, coming from over there." He pointed beyond the edge of the waterfall. "Voltage spike, off the scale!"

"Is it getting warmer?" Mulder asked, playing with the collar of his shirt. A draft of warm wind hit his face, blowing his bangs from his eyes.

Mulder started to move again, but Scully clasped her hand around his arm in a fierce grip. She had her back to the waterfall. "No, don't. I don't like this, Mulder."

"Scully?"

Eddie took another step closer to the waterfall. "I think I can see it."

Scully whirled, yelled, "No! Eddie!"

Just as the words left her mouth, she tensed, doubled over in pain. She wrapped her arms around her head to dull the barrage assaulting her ears.

Mulder grabbed her shoulders as she started to sway. "Scully!"

A loud whine erupted from the cavern.

Mulder put his hands to his ears. He waved Eddie away from the edge of the waterfall. "Get out of there!" Pushing Scully ahead of him, they scrambled for the tunnel entrance.

Water sloshed and splashed as they ran away from the waterfall. Bright flashes stabbed through the darkness with each new buzzing pulse, strobing as the frequency increased.

Scully dove for cover when the whine became a sustained high pitched note. She felt Mulder fall down next to her, using his body as a shield. A final bright flash tore through her closed eyelids, scouring the back of her eyes with its searing intensity.



he didn't move for several seconds after that. She wasn't sure if she could move, and was too frightened to try. There was a hand on her shoulder, fingers brushed her cheek.

"C'mon, Scully. Open your eyes."

Scully did so hesitantly, one first, then the other. It took a second for her eyes to focus.

Mulder stood in front of her, a smile of relief on his normally smug face. Water dripped down the left side of his face. His hair on that side was plastered to his head.

"You okay?" he asked. "You wiggled out there for a minute."

Slowly she nodded, then noticed that she was sitting in very cold water. She tried to stand, with Mulder's help. "Where're Eddie and Dr. Weinier?"

"Over here," Eddie answered. "What the hell just happened?"

Mulder did not let go of Scully's arm. She leaned against the wall, sucking in air as if fighting for breath.

Mulder tried to kneel down beside her, tensing as his injured knee protested the sudden movement. He placed a hand on the back of her neck, slowly massaging the knotted muscles he felt. "Scully?"

She had trouble finding her voice. "I don't feel so good."

"Eddie," Mulder called. "Go find Scully's pack. There's a cellular phone in one of the pockets. Call Agent Jerry Doran at the local field office. Tell him where we are. You may have to get outside the caverns to get through. Tell him to bring Search and Rescue."

"The hum is gone."

Weinier plodded through the water as if in a daze. Scully and Mulder looked up. The physicist pressed the heel of his hand to his temple. "I can't hear the hum anymore. None of it."

Scully tried to straighten. Her stomach cramped as she did, her face went pale. Mulder stepped back, apparently afraid of what might happen

next. From his expression, Scully figured he'd guessed right. Scully fought the urge to throw up, and lost.

Mulder pulled a soggy, but clean, bandanna from his jeans pocket and gave it to her so she could clean up a bit. He rubbed her back, moving his hand in slow, small circles. "Feel any better?"

"No."

Mulder checked on Weinier, then hobbled towards the waterfall.

"Mulder —" Scully warned.

Mulder stepped closer to the edge. "No, I think it's okay."

"How can you be so sure?"

He waved her back. It took him a while to actually get to the edge of the waterfall. Beneath him was a plunge pool, glowing a strange color of green. There was just enough illumination in the room to see a small metallic contraption on the other side of the cavern. If it was the source of the flashes and buzzing, it wasn't doing anything now.

Dislodging a small rock with his toe, the rock tumbled and spilled into the plunge pool. Upon impact with the surface, it started to fizz and boil in the water. Smoky tendrils of hydrogen gas left a trail in the water as the stone slowly made its way to the bottom depths. He watched until he could no longer see it in the illumined pool.

Slowly regaining strength in her legs, Scully stumbled towards Weinier's pack. Pointing to it, she asked, "Do you have the ELF magnetometer with you?"

Weinier nodded and fished it out of his pack. He handed it to her.

"Can this be adapted to act like a voltmeter?" Scully asked, looking over the box carefully. Voltmeters weren't nearly this versatile when she was an undergrad.

"Just change the output signal; bottom button, left side."

Before doing so, she took a frequency reading. "I'm picking up a signal in the 20 HZ range."

"It's not uncommon for bedrock to resonate at low frequencies after an earthquake."

"But we didn't just experience an earthquake, Doctor."

"Mechanical energy, heat energy. light energy, what's the difference, really?"

Scully didn't have the time or the heart to argue. Switching to a voltmeter display, the digital face ran numbers by so quickly it was hard to register a single reading. Another button read 'analog.' Couldn't hurt, she thought to herself as she depressed the button. The racing numbers were replaced by a digital version of a needle and number scale. The digital needle swung back and forth wildly.

Mulder was dangerously close to the edge now.

"Mulder, whatever is over there is still putting out a lot of voltage."

The needle stilled, and fell to zero. "Mulder —"

He turned from his perch, called her over to his side. "Come see this."

Handing the voltmeter back to Weinier, she slowly walked over, equilibrium so disturbed she thought she might throw up again at any swift motion. She watched as he dropped a stone into the water. It started to dissolve slowly.

"How did you know, Scully? If we were inside here when it happened —" He looked down at the plunge.

"I don't know, Mulder." Her voice sounded thick and choked. She nodded towards the thing across the way. "What do you think it is?"

"Ten to one odds it's bigger than a breadbox."

"It's quiet now. Why did it stop so suddenly?"

"Maybe *they* forgot to use the Coppertop," he replied, pointing up. "Built to last longer."

The object seemed harmless now, like any other piece of machinery that someone had left for

scrap. Scully sat on her heels, letting the water run across her hand. A strand of seaweed slipped over and between her fingers. She grabbed for it before it could slip over the edge of the waterfall. More seaweed followed a similar course. She turned around. The algae seemed to be sloughing off the stream's banks, falling into the stream and then the pool below.

"Mulder, the algae —" She retrieved the sample she had stashed in her back pocket. It was now shriveled and dried out.

"It's dying," she continued.

Mulder stared at the plastic bag for a few seconds, then started for the ledge. He stumbled, and landed on his rear end next to her. Another rock slipped into the plunge pool, but there was no effervescence following it to the bottom.

Scully grabbed his wrist. "Where are you going?"

"Down there, to collect samples. When that *thing* over there shut down, it killed the algae with it. That plunge pool was full of acid just a few minutes ago. Now, it's not. There is some sort of symbiont relationship going on there, and I want to know more about it." He tried to scoot forward.

Shaking her head, Scully pulled him away from the edge. "No, you're not. We have no idea if that thing is going to go berserker on us again. I won't let you take that chance."

"We've got a fifteen minute window," Mulder exclaimed, if that cycle Dr. Weinier monitored is right."

"There's no guarantee that this is going to stick to some cycle. Besides, you need to have that knee looked at."

"I wasn't the one puking my guts out a few minutes ago."

"Yeah, well, you're not going down there, I'm not staying here, so we're going up there."

"That made no sense at all."

"Humor me."

"We're missing a grand opportunity here, Scully," he implored, pointing at the hunk of junk across the way. "That is not man made."

"You don't know that for sure."

"Then what is it doing here in a cavern in the middle of nowhere? Why has Weinier's humming stopped moments after this thing went ballistic? Why is this algae dying off? How did the bodies of three collage students get from here to a rest stop nearly 30 miles away?" His voice carried and echoed through the cavernous room.

"I don't know, Mulder! I don't have all the answers."

"The answers are down there!" he replied hoarsely, not wanting another opportunity to pass him by the way side. "It's dying, and I think it has been dying for a long time. That's what caused the humming. Just like a television that's been knocked around a bit too much."

"And we just happen to stumble on it during its death throes?"

"Why not?"

"Mulder —"

Ignoring her protests, he grabbed her upper arm a little more forcibly than he intended. She glared at his hand, then at him. Letting go of his iron tight grip, but not of her arm or his intention, he pointed at the remains below once again. "Someone or something wanted to hide that thing from the public's eye. We still don't know how those bodies got to the rest stop. Now, unless you've decided to believe in molecular transport, someone moved those bodies, and that someone will eventually come back to claim their property."

Scully closed her eyes, counted to ten, slowly. "It's not safe to go down there."

"It's dead, Scully."

"You don't know that!"

"We need to gather as much evidence as we can. Right now. Otherwise, it's all going to be taken away from us again."

"Mulder, we have evidence. We have the bodies, we have the autopsy reports, we have the tarp covering the bodies, we have the algae, we have the recordings we made today of the hum and the energy emissions."

"If you're afraid, I'll go down myself —"

Her expression spoke volumes. Mulder almost flinched, but maintained his determined composure under her icy glare.

Scully's voice was low and bitter. "Fear has nothing to do with this. And even if it did, it's given me a modicum of common sense that you seem to lack. Those kids died because we are assuming they were too close to that thing. Evidence is not worth losing your life."

"It's dead, Scully —"

"Excuse me." Both were so absorbed in their argument, they didn't hear Weinier approach. Weinier knelt down so that they could see the readout screen of the instrument he carried. "Power emissions are starting to pick up again. I suggest we leave."

Mulder slowly got up on one knee, turned around as surely as he could without falling in the water again. One soaking was enough for one day. "Can you hear the hum again, Doctor?"

"No. But these pulses are coming more frequently than they were up top. If that thing hasn't died yet, it's bound to soon. And not quietly, if what we've just witnessed is any indication. X-ray band emissions are also increasing. It is not safe to stay down here much longer."

They all turned when they heard splashing headed their way. Eddie was half carrying, half dragging his pack behind him. Scully's cellular was in his other hand. "Search and Rescue is on their way. They are going to meet us in the cave where Mac came in."

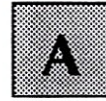
"Thank you, Eddie," Scully replied, slowly standing up. "Let's get out of here, Mulder, while we still can."

Reluctantly, Mulder took her proffered hand and eased himself to an upright position. He leaned heavily on Scully as they started to walk.

"You know, Scully, if you were just a little bit taller, you'd make the perfect crutch."

"Shut up, or I'll throw up on you."

"Promise?"



As they neared the central cavern, the entire area was rocked with a tremendous jolt. Thrown from their feet, all four landed in a heap. The ground continued to roll under them. A blast of dry, hot wind followed them out of the tunnel.

Scully rolled off of Mulder, rested on her back as the room spun around her. Mulder turned over on his stomach, laying his forehead in the crook of his arm.

"I think it's dead, Mulder," Scully said, followed by a tired, silly laugh.

Mulder groaned into the ground. "Glad to hear it. I think you landed on my knee."

"I'll send you a bundt cake."

"Is everyone okay?" Weinier asked.

"I'm just going to lie here till the paramedics arrive," Mulder said. "Wake me when they get here."

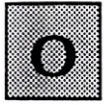
"Mulder, you need to elevate that knee," Scully reminded him, also resigned to just lying on her back until the cavalry came.

Mulder shook his head. "Too much thinking involved. Won't happen in this lifetime."

Eddie stood up and dusted himself off. "I'm going to go up top and flag down the Search and Rescue party." Free climbing the rock face, he was up and out of the cave in under fifteen minutes.

Mulder watched him climb, then returned to his rest position. "Makes you wish you were young again, doesn't it, Scully?"

"I never did that when I was young."



Outside Hanover Cavern
Outside Las Cruces, New
Mexico
7:49 p.m. MDT

Mulder let the paramedic wrap his knee with a heavy ace bandage without complaint. He had wasted all of his brownie points with the attractive Army medic, ranting and raving when she'd had to slice the leg of a perfectly good pair of jeans to get at his knee.

He sat just inside the ambulance's back door, watching as the Army's decon unit hauled the remains of the object to a truck. Somehow, the decon arrived before Search and Rescue, and Mulder wondered what power-that-be informed them of the contraption. The decon unit had the remains stored in a thick lead box. When he asked about energy emissions, they said it had given off none since they arrived. He didn't believe them.

The Army was packing up to go. It had taken them nearly two hours to get it all out of the caverns, and he wanted to be around when it was retrieved. He asked to see the object, a request that was flatly refused.

They assured him that tests would be conducted to determine its composition, its origins, its function, if possible. The nature of the fluids in the plunge pool, they'd said, was even more obscure. The water itself had an appreciable saline content, but no corrosive agents were found when they tested it. Certain alkaloids could not be identified; further tests had been ordered. The algae on the sides of the pool contained a strange chemical compound that field tests could not identify.

Mulder threw the ice pack against the plastic walls that held him prisoner.

Scully stirred behind him. She was curled up on the ambulance's gurney, wrapped in several blankets. The hot water bottle she held against her right ear fell to the floor. She had been sleeping for the last hour or so, thanks to a heavy dose of antihistamines and antibiotics. Mulder reached in, picked up the hot water bottle, and placed it against her neck and ear once more.

The decon doctor who had checked them out when they'd first left the cave climbed into the protective plastic bubble surrounding the

ambulance. he was still wearing his safe suit with the exception of the plastic oxygen hood.

"We've released your friends. There was no biological contagion. You're free to go."

Mulder nodded towards the shielded container that the "object" was being placed in. "Not until I know where that thing is going. We intend to take it to Washington as evidence."

"I'm sorry, that won't be possible in the near future."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one, your partner is in no condition to fly home. She's got a nice inner-ear infection. Flying right now is not advisable."

Mulder put his hand near Scully's head, stroked her hair protectively. "Three students died here last week, and all of them had ruptured eardrums."

The doctor unzipped his suit and shrugged out of the shoulders. The arms dangled lifelessly at his sides. He picked up the medical sheet and read off the results. "No sign of puncture. Strictly bacterial infection. Probably's had it a few days now, judging from the fluid levels behind her eardrum."

A crate, labeled United States Army Decontamination Unit, was fork lifted into an olive green truck. Mulder hobbled toward the entrance of the plastic bubble tent. "Where are they taking it?"

"To a facility where it can be studied."

"It is evidence in a Federal investigation."

"When we're done with our tests, you can have it back."

Mulder turned around. "When will that be?"

"That information is on a need-to-know basis."

"I need to know."

"No, sir, you do not."



-Z Sleep Motel
Las Cruces, New Mexico
Friday, May 19, 1995
11:43 a.m. MDT

The receiver hung idly in Mulder's left hand, his right hand was poised over the face plate of the motel phone, ready to dial the next number on today's hit list. He was in an unusually chipper mood, despite the fact that he knew it would go away the minute he started his tirade of phone calls to all of his contacts to try and find the lead lined box with itty bitty pieces that no one could identify or classify. But he forgot about the switchboard operator talking in his ear when the bathroom door opened.

Scully clutched the door frame as she stumbled out of the bathroom. She glared one warning glance at Mulder about snide remarks, then continued to fall towards the bed. Once there, she crawled on hands and knees across the mattress, burrowing her head in the pillows. She fell to her side, and groped for the blankets.

"Uh, Scully?" Mulder put the receiver in its cradle.

"What?" came the muffled response.

"Our flight leaves at five. Do you want me to reschedule it?" It took all of his will power not to roll into a series of bad puns and bathroom jokes. Next antihistamine dose wasn't for another hour, he knew, and she would be out like a light within half an hour after that. Despite her assurances that she was fine, just a little dizzy, he had watched her run for the bathroom three times that morning alone. He had hobbled in himself, only using one crutch instead of two, wanting company. Ranting on the phone was no fun without an audience, even a sick audience. Besides, just because she was spending half the time praying to the porcelain gods, that didn't mean she couldn't spoon feed him her notes on the case.

"Yes." She borrowed farther into the nest of pillows. "Now, tell the room to stop spinning."

"Sorry, against the physical laws of the universe."

"How come we can't make it through a single case without one of us ending up in a hospital?"

Mulder laughed; he had been thinking the same thing himself. "A matter of conjecture. We did not, in fact, end up in a hospital this time."

"What's the difference?"

"About \$2000. Can we get on with our field report before you lose lucidity again?"

"Another crack like that, and I'll throw you out of my room."

"I'd like to see you try." He was about to pick up the phone to change their travel plans when it started ringing. "Mulder."

"Agent Mulder, this is Harold Weinier."

"What can I do you for, Dr. Weinier?"

"I tried to run the recordings we made the other day down in that cave. I don't know, something must have happened, maybe the recorder was faulty, maybe the tape was degaussed with all the radiation that thing was emitting —"

Mulder slumped in his chair. Axe Exhibit A. "You lost the recording?"

"Only that which I made in the caves. I still have all of the data I recorded above ground, including the energy emissions. I can send you a copy via modem if you like."

"Thanks for calling, Dr. Weinier," Mulder replied. "We appreciate all the help you gave us."

"You're more than welcome, Agent Mulder. I only wish it had turned out better in the end."

"So do I." He hung up the phone with a hint of frustration. Don't want to waste it on just this, he thought to himself. I have to save it for the brickwalls I'm going to hit this afternoon.

There was a knock at the door. Mulder stood to unlatch the door as he heard something that resembled 'Grand Central Station' and 'use the crutches' come from the lump under the covers. In deference to his partner, he stepped outside the motel door into the midmorning sunshine.

"Jerry," Mulder said, momentarily letting go of the crutches to shake the man's hand. "What brings you here?"

Jerry Doran grabbed for the floppy fishing hat on his head, wiped his brow of sweat with the brim. "I saved as much of the evidence from the case I

could find before the decon unit came in. The tarp is in the back of my car; we never listed it in the initial crime scene reports. No one knows it exists."

"Did your guys get anything on the algae we picked up?"

Bobbing his head in a maybe-maybe not fashion, Doran replied, "I had a friend at the college look into it, completely hush hush. He's never seen anything like it. I gave him your card, he'll be contacting you soon. I know how much discretion means to you. Out here, in the heart of nuclear testing, I've had a lot of cases taken away from me by the powers that be, especially concerning investigations of the radiation tests of the 1950's."

"Thanks, Jerry."

"The families of those three kids have asked that the bodies be released so that they can have a proper burial."

"I'll get Scully to sign off the reports."

Doran nodded, then started for his car. Before he got ten feet, he turned and walked back. "Oh, yeah, I forgot. Drago's back. Checked himself into the VA hospital in White Sands on Wednesday. Doherty talked with him yesterday; said he was more coherent than he'd ever seen him before. Almost as if he was never shot in the head."

Eyebrows raised, Mulder leaned forward. "What did he say?"

"Drago doesn't remember the last ten years. He woke up Wednesday afternoon, had no idea where he was, what he had been doing. Hitched a ride into White Sands, went straight to the VA hospital. He remembers being there ten years ago for an infection in his leg, and that's about it."

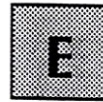
"What about the hum? Does he remember the hum?"

"You'd have to ask him yourself, Mulder. I can arrange a car so you can talk to him."

Mulder abandoned his crutches near the side of the door, debated whether or not to go back to his own room to fetch a few things. "I've got to talk to Scully first. Meet me back here in say, half an hour?"

"Yeah, sure. What do you want to talk to Drago for?"

"Just a hunch."



**Excerpt from Field Log: Agent D. Scully
May 24, 1995**

"... trace amounts of fluids found on the victims' clothes are believed to have originated from the plunge pool described by Agent Mulder, though this conclusion cannot be substantiated due to lack of samples of said fluid from the plunge pool. The fluids taken from the clothes and the victims' lungs contain compounds that are so far unidentifiable. Tests done on scraps of algae taken from the scene also contain these compounds, though their origins are unknown."

"A chemical solvent that burns the skin but leaves clothing virtually undamaged has not been identified. The nature of the acid burns on all victims, including the cases cited by Agent Mulder, is still elusive."

"Agent Mulder's interview of one Lieutenant Vincent Joseph Drago in connection with the low frequency hum heard by a select few in the area around Las Cruces, New Mexico yielded few tenable results. Lt. Drago recalls none of the ten years since his disappearance from the White Sands VA Hospital in 1984. Lt. Drago has agreed to undergo hypnosis therapy to recover memories from the past ten years, though this agent believes that useful information will not be forthcoming."

"Energy emission recordings taken the afternoon of May 17, 1995, have been documented. If they are indeed the result of the breakdown of the device described by both Agent Mulder and myself, there is nothing to compare these readings to in order to devise a reasonable explanation for their existence. Attempts to attain information from the United States Army Decontamination Unit concerning the object removed from Hanover Cavern have been ignored to this date. Any requests for said information are waylaid with a memo saying no object was recovered from the caverns of New Mexico ..."

Call for Papers

THE YOUNG INDIANA JONES CHRONICLES

He wielded the television remote control with authority, picking his way through the vast wasteland of cable TV channels with care. Mid-afternoon, and there was nothing on except that foolish trial from Los Angeles. Even the shopping channels had turned their avaricious attention to it. He sighed, eyed the videotape cabinet with suspicion, and switched the television off.

Outside, a chill, dreary rain fell, cloaking the world in a dismal pall. He couldn't even go out and putter in the garden. He remembered digs where rain — sometimes gales — had forced him to inactivity inside the tents. But then he'd had his fellow archaeologists for company, people to swap war stories with, people who shared his passion for adventure and knowledge. Then he'd had Marion, too, but she'd been gone for many years. He glanced down at the simple gold wedding band on his left hand and sighed again. Like everything else in his life, it had a story to tell, but there was no one left to tell it to. Everyone was gone — Marcus, Sallah, even Sallah's children. All he had left was his daughter Marion and her children, and his memories.

A scrape at the doorway caught his attention, and he looked up with interest. A glance at the mantle clock told him it was near time for the mail delivery. Maybe there'd be something interesting there, maybe the latest issue of *Archaeology*, maybe an inquiry about one of his articles or books. He didn't quite know what to make of being the subject of doctoral theses these days, but the interviews and questions passed the time.

At nearly a hundred years old, time hung heavily on his lanky frame. Time was both his mistress

and his enemy. He smiled bitterly at the thought and roused himself to go collect the mail.

As he opened the front door, he caught sight of the postal carrier scurrying down the walkway, rain falling heavily on the slick surface of his rain poncho. He could call the man back, maybe engage him in conversation for a few minutes, but the gust of wind that shoved the carrier this way and that dissuaded him. No one deserved to be stuck out in this kind of weather for long.

He pulled a fistful of mail out of the box and quickly shut the door, sealing out the inclement weather. He shuffled through the mail, finally reaching a crumpled, large white envelope with his name on it. And the logo of the Georgetown Institute. He smiled. This could be interesting.

Dropping back into his spot on the couch, he laid down Marion's mail and tore into the GI envelope with relish. Inside, he found a couple of sheets of paper, one a letter signed with a flourishing hand. He scanned the contents of the letter, and his smile grew. This *would* be interesting!

"A paranormal conference," he breathed delightedly. "Ah, the stories I could tell ..." He shook his head. Most of those stories, no one would believe. Who would credit that he'd once beheld the Ark of the Covenant? That he'd witnessed, albeit through closed eyes, the wrath of God? Or that he had once been under the thrall of Shiva, controlled by a Thuggee priest? Or that these gnarled old hands had once held the Cup of Christ, the Holy Grail? Or better still, had once walked the streets of Atlantis, had fed beads of oricalcum into Atlantean machines that still worked after untold thousands of years?

He sighed with pleasure this time. He'd led a good life, seen things most men only dreamed of, if they dared dream at all. Julianna Moorhouse wanted him to present a paper on the paranormal and ancient cultures. A paper? He could write a book, a whole series. He'd experienced it all first-hand. He rose with a crackle of energy and headed for his study ... there was so much to do!

Indiana Jones theatrical movies:

Indiana (Henry, Jr.) Jones Harrison Ford
 Sallah John Rhys Davies
 Marcus Brody Denholm Elliot

Raiders of the Lost Ark
 Temple of Doom
 The Last Crusade

The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles

(ABC/Family Channel)

Young Indy (teenager) Sean Patrick Flannery
 Young Indy (child) Corey Carrier
 Old Indy George Hall
 Remy Ronny Couteure
 Helen Seymour (tutor) Margaret Tyzack
 Henry Jones, Sr. (Indy's father) Lloyd Owen
 Mrs. Jones (Indy's mother) Ruth De Sosa
 Ernie (Ernest) Hemingway Jay Underwood

Premise:

Son of Grail scholar Henry Jones, Sr., Henry Jones, Jr., or Indiana as he preferred to be called, had a knack for finding adventure and excitement wherever he went. At 10, he accompanied his parents on a world tour, meeting some of history's most famous notables of the period. At 16, he joined the army of Pancho Villa, and followed up by enlisting in the Belgian Army during the first World War. As an adult, he taught archaeology at Barnett College, and led some of the most incredible archaeological excursions imaginable — the search for the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy Grail, the Cross of Cortez, and other equally invaluable and mystical artifacts. As an old man, he reminisced about his adventures, almost to the stupification of his listeners, but Indiana Jones had always had his finger on the pulse of history, and his eye on the fantastic.

Episode List (in order of airdate):

Young Indiana Jones and the Curse of the Jackal London, May 1916 British East Africa, September 1909 Verdun, September 1916 German East Africa, December 1916 Congo, January 1917 Austria, March 1917 Somme, Early August 1916 Germany, Mid-August 1916 Barcelona, May 1917	Young Indiana Jones and the Mystery of the Blues Princeton, February 1916 Petrograd, July 1917 Young Indiana Jones and the Scandal of 1920 Vienna, November 1908 Northern Italy, June 1918 Young Indiana Jones and the Phantom Train of Doom Ireland, April 1916 Paris, September 1908 Peking, March 1910	Benares, January 1910 Paris, October 1916 Istanbul, September 1918 Paris, May 1919 Florence, May 1908 Prague, August 1917 Palestine, October 1917 Transylvania, January 1918 Young Indiana Jones and the Hollywood Follies Young Indiana Jones: Treasure of the Peacock's Eye Young Indiana Jones and the Attack of the Flying Hawkmen
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FOREVER
KNIGHT

A Walk By The Lake

by Maddog

*How quick the sun can drop away
And now my bitter hands
Cradle broken glass
Of what was everything
All the pictures had
All been washed in black
Tattooed everything
All the love gone bad
Turned my world to black
Tattooed all I see
All that I am
All I'll be ...*

— "Black" by Pearl Jam

"A nd now the Nightcrawler will leave you all tucked safely in your bed with the demons lying in wait underneath," LaCroix concluded his radio talk show for the night. He enjoyed the creative challenge it gave him to try to come up with something new night after night. It was an amusing diversion to help pass eternity, but right now he had to attend his visitor. He'd seen the deceptively young-looking figure enter the waiting area outside the control booth half an hour ago. Not wanting to hurry the show any, after all it had taken him over an hour to get the audience to the point where they were, he'd simply nodded and let the person wait. Exiting the booth, he greeted his visitor. "Hello, Zavi, enjoy the show?"

"It was very ... interesting," Zavi replied, a grin passing over his face. In outward appearance, Zavi was about sixteen or seventeen years old. Black hair, shaved on the sides and long on top in the current fashion, framed a black-eyed, slightly Asiatic-looking face. His thin, muscular frame was clad in a Pearl Jam Alive T-shirt and baggy blue jeans. He could have been any teenager on the streets of Toronto. He wasn't, though; he had been born and brought across into his current vampiric state nearly two thousand years before.

"Interesting?" LaCroix raised an eyebrow in response, suggesting that he didn't appreciate the implied meaning of the word. He was a tall man, well over six feet, with a powerful frame, dressed

in crisp black pants, black cashmere sweater and black wool jacket. Penetrating blue eyes were set beneath short cropped blond hair. His entire being suggested a predator in repose.

Zavi met LaCroix's eyes and made a face. "Not my kind of subject, what were you trying to do? Give them nightmares?"

"I was trying to make them think, actually," LaCroix responded softly.

"Amounts to the same thing," the other vampire shrugged. "By the way, were you aware that there's a character in *Excalibur* named Nightcrawler? He used to be with the X-Men."

"And who are the X-Men? A band?"

"No, comic book."

"Really, Zavi, your taste in literature is appalling at times," LaCroix scolded, shaking his head.

"Didn't you like the *Sandman* comics I sent you?"

"Some of them, I especially liked Gaiman's portrayal of death. Rather comforting for mortals to think of death as a friendly woman waiting to greet them, don't you agree?"

"Liked it myself. Are you busy for the rest of the night, LaCroix? I fancy a walk and would like some company," Zavi picked up the black leather biker's jacket he'd thrown on a nearby chair.

LaCroix considered the invitation for a moment, wondering at the motivation behind it. Zavi rarely did anything without having a purpose in mind. Sometimes it was an illogical, even whimsical reason, but a reason nonetheless. They'd spent time in each other's company over the centuries. He could be an interesting and delightfully unpredictable companion. Though both Nicholas and Janette, LaCroix's two fledglings, found his behavior irritating at times. That had been another reason to have him around, he acknowledged to himself. Indicating that Zavi should lead the way, they left the radio station.

It was chilly out, Fall in Toronto could be cold at times and it was several hours until dawn yet. A black Porsche was parked outside, LaCroix heard the faint beep of an electronic signal opening the locks to it. The vanity license plate read "SuxBld."

Opening the door, he sat in the black leather interior and waited for the car to start. As soon as the engine turned over he found his ears assaulted by a loud blaring and pulsing. Putting his hands over his sensitive ears to protect them, he glared around for the source of the discomfort.

Zavi grinned at him and fiddled with one of the many controls in the car. The sound died down to a dull roar. "Sorry, I forget that not everybody likes music as loud as I do."

"You call that music?"

"Yeah, it's got a melody and a beat. Seems to fit the description of music," came the annoyed reply. The song's words filtered through the car. *"And now my bitter hands chafe beneath the clouds of what was everything. Oh, the pictures have all been washed in black, tattooed everything."*

"I suppose you're right," LaCroix acknowledged reluctantly, even though he was listening intently to the lyrics. *"Oh, and twisted thoughts that spin round my head. I'm spinning."*

"I usually am," Zavi responded, allowing a small grin to form. LaCroix knew he often seemed to be all knowing and all seeing. And Zavi enjoyed poking fun at him by imitating the same behavior. It was a dangerous game. Admittedly, LaCroix could be very volatile, but Zavi had fun and LaCroix enjoyed indulging him in it.

The larger vampire snorted in response, his eyes roaming around the car, searching, as they always did, for any information that could possibly be useful. The inside of the Porsche was spotless, the only sign of disarray was the clutter of CDs and tapes in the cramped backseat and a single brown envelope. LaCroix decided that he'd let Zavi make the first move tonight. He could not yet discern the reason for the other's unexpected invitation. He did not feel threatened, so he could afford to wait and see what would develop.

They drove through the darkened roads. Few people were out so late and it was not yet time for even the earliest of workers to be on the streets. Zavi made no conversation as they traveled, the only sounds coming from the car's CD player. Handling the car in efficient silence, he soon took them down toward Lake Ontario. Parking the car in a deserted lot near the shore, they stepped out of the car. The fall air was heavy with moisture,

no stars were reflected in the water, blanked out by the rapidly-forming fog. No birds, not even the ever-present lake gulls, were awake yet, making the only noise the gentle lapping of water on sand. Without saying a word, Zavi walked away from the lot down towards the shore, finally stopping inches from the water. The other vampire followed him silently. They stood there for a minute before the younger-looking man broke the silence.

"I've always enjoyed being by a large body of water, you know, makes me feel so insignificant. The size of it all, the sheer power of that amount of water. It's daunting."

"You enjoy feeling insignificant?" LaCroix asked, voice soft in the night.

"Yes, I think it helps me keep a perspective on things."

"What things are you talking about, Zavi?"

"I think people get distracted by all the little things in day-to-day living. They get lost in inconsequentialities. What do I have to do today? Where do I have to go? Where am I going to get food? What do they think of me?" Zavi explained in a melodic voice, remnants of a language not heard in a thousand years softening his vowels. He looked at his companion's face. "They get trapped under a thousand details and let themselves be crushed by them."

"Mortals do that. Perhaps it helps them forget how short and fragile their lives really are."

Shaking his head, Zavi stared out into the dark water. "Not just mortals, LaCroix, vampires as well. Our lives are very much the same. Some of the day-to-day details are a bit different, I admit. Vampires have an easier time for some things, harder for others. And of course, we have so much more time to work things out. But in the end, it's the same."

LaCroix regarded the other vampire. This reflective mood was one he had never seen before. While never a complete hedonist, living only for the hunt and pleasure, Zavi had enjoyed indulging himself. LaCroix decided not to say anything yet, waiting to find out where Zavi was going with this conversation.

Taking a slow deep breath, Zavi continued, "When I look at all the water out there I feel that everything that happens is very small. All that water doesn't care what I eat today, or if I'm having a good day. The water doesn't care what ships are sailing on it, what life resides in it, or if people are going to try to hem it in with some manmade contraption. It goes where it will and crushes anything that gets in its path if it wants to. You ever seen a hurricane, LaCroix, ever see people rushing about trying to protect their little bit of coastline? As if anything they do could stop a force like that."

"Zavi, does all this philosophy have a point?"

"You came to Toronto to be near Nicholas and Janette, didn't you?"

LaCroix tensed mentally, trying to determine the reasoning behind the question. "What if I did?" he responded, dismissively.

"Not everyone is so connected to their fledglings as you are, LaCroix. Most turn them loose after a few years, yet you always keep yours close by. I've always wondered why?"

LaCroix controlled the sudden surge of anger he felt. He did not like this line of conversation. As long as he adhered to the vampiric Code, his actions were nobody's concern but his own. LaCroix kept his voice cold and level, "My reasons are my own and do not concern you."

"You made Nicholas nearly eight hundred years ago, yet still you feel the need to play father to him. Why do ..."

Zavi's words were cut off as LaCroix grabbed his shoulder in a crushing grip. Forcing Zavi to look at him LaCroix asked, words brittle, eyes bright red with anger, "What is the point of all this? What I do with my creations is not your concern."

Wrenching off LaCroix's grip, Zavi turned back to the lake and gave a soft reply, "Gustav died last month. He decided to watch the sun rise again."

LaCroix looked down at the other vampire, his eyes returning to their normal shade of blue. He remembered Gustav. He had been one of Zavi's fledglings, a tall, powerful Swede with shoulder-length blond hair that he'd always worn loose. He had always been filled with energy, LaCroix

recalled, the force of his personality, his desire for constant movement, had hit one physically when he'd entered the room. Gustav's brightness and incessant need for socialization and action had always stood in contrast to darker Zavi's calmer, more reticent personality. LaCroix had once heard another vampire say that the reason Zavi had turned Gustav was that he had missed the sun and this was as close to it as anything living was. So this was the reason for Zavi's mood. Turning his gaze to the dark waters, he gently replied, "I'm sorry."

Shrugging his shoulders, the darker vampire continued to stare straight ahead, nodding his head slightly, Zavi continued, "Yeah. I never thought that Gustav would decide to die. He always seemed so ... thrilled with being alive. Everything was interesting to him, every day just brought something new for him to be amused with. But I guess even joy gets tiresome after hundreds of years."

"Many of us cannot keep up with the changes that happen over time, Zavi. You know as well as I that more vampires choose to die than are killed by hunters. The world changes, they feel isolated, out of sync," LaCroix explained, "The strong and adaptable survive, the others ..." he let his words trail off.

"I know all that," Zavi countered sadly, wind ruffling through his hair. The air was beginning to grow warmer around them. "I've seen it happen often enough. Did you know, LaCroix, that none of my get are alive anywhere in the world today?"

"So create some more," LaCroix suggested practically. The answer seemed simple enough to him.

"For what reason?"

"If you're lonely for companionship, Zavi, it is an easy enough matter to create some company for yourself."

"No, what I meant was, why do we create them anyway?"

"It's a gift," LaCroix responded, for that was what he considered it. The greatest gift one could give to another. The gift of strength, of power, of life eternal.

"I remember when I gave Gustav that gift. He was dancing the first time I saw him. There were dozens of others dancing as well, but they might have all been stick figures beside him. He danced with every fiber of his being, just as he did everything. I gave him the gift because I couldn't bear to watch him slowly eaten away by time or disease," Zavi explained, eyes focused not on the water but on the distant memory. LaCroix could almost see the memory — Gustav dancing by candlelight, golden hair flying, laughter driving back the night. "But why do we bother to create them at all? Mortals have children because it makes them immortal. We *are* immortal."

"For companionship?" LaCroix suggested, "Amusement?"

"Love?"

LaCroix looked skyward for a moment before replying, giving a reluctant nod. "I suppose that is a reason for some."

"Since Gustav died, I've been thinking of all the others that I've created over the centuries. Lisette, Guillaume, Yuri, and many others. Tried to recall exactly what reason I had for bringing them across, what made them different to me. What makes one person your prey and one your companion, LaCroix? What makes one human being different than another?"

"Every person is different," LaCroix felt like he was stating the obvious. Every person was different, even those that became his sustenance for the night. Each had his or own own hopes and dreams, you could taste it on their blood.

"True, people are different whether mortal or immortal. We all have our reasons," Zavi gave a tight little grin, "I suppose we all do what we do because it seemed like a good idea at the time."

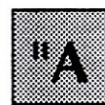
The two vampires stood there in silence for a few minutes. The gentle lapping of the water was the only sound. LaCroix waited patiently for Zavi to continue the conversation. He let his thoughts drift back in time, recalling events with Nicholas and Janette. The hours he had spent watching Janette sell her body on the streets, the sound of her screams when he rescued her from a brutal attack. Nicholas, the fair-haired knight, filled with good intentions, being seduced by Janette. His musings were interrupted by Zavi.

"No, that's not it. There has to be some reason we choose who we do," fixing his companion with his eyes, he continued, "What are you trying to create, LaCroix? Why did you choose whom you did? Why did I? Is there some play in our heads that we're always trying to find actors for? A scene which must be played over and over again? Are we trying to recreate something from our mortal life? Fulfill some need that can't be denied?"

"I would say that my fledglings needed me more than I needed them."

"Really?"

"Yes, after all, where would they be without me? Long-dead and forgotten," the larger vampire replied assuredly. He remembered all the times that he had helped them since their creation. Protecting them from hunters, the sun, even, in Nicholas's case when they suspected him of breaking the Code, the Enforcers. For all their protestations of independence, they both needed them. Janette would never be as bold to suggest it. She seemed self-sufficient enough, owner of a nightclub, The Raven, handler of all the problems that came into the club from both the vampires and the mortals. Even Nicholas showed up at her door when he had a problem. LaCroix was proud of the hard exterior she showed to the world but he knew exactly where the chinks were in that self-assured shell. The blood she drank continually laced with wine, the way she listened to the mortal prostitutes who found a haven in her club, her deep love and concern for Nicholas. And what of Nicholas, his prodigal son? The child who wanted no part of him or the gift he had bestowed. He would need him when he realized that his foolish dream of mortality was ridiculous. Then Nicholas would need him to pick up the pieces and give him direction once again.



nd where would you be without them?" Zavi finally asked. The question hung in the moisture-laden air. He did not expect an answer. Wishing he was better with words so that he could explain to LaCroix what he was feeling and thinking, he stood there trying to put the right words together. Zavi wasn't even sure why he was trying to have this conversation with LaCroix, of all people. Then, he supposed, the answer was really simple when you thought about it. Collecting his thoughts, Zavi ran a hand across the shaved back of his head, then spoke, "Have you ever

considered that they give you far more than you ever gave them?"

"What?" LaCroix demanded incredulously, turning his gaze from the lake to the other vampire.

Zavi returned the gaze and nodded, "Yes. We grant them power and immortality. We give them our eternal protection, for what it's worth. But do you know what they give us in return?"

"I have no idea," came LaCroix's puzzled reply.

"They give us a reason to keep going on," Zavi pronounced. "Our fledglings help connect us with the world. Without them," he shrugged and looked at the sky, and a gull called off to their right somewhere, "there's nothing to keep us going but our hunger."

LaCroix considered the other man's words. Was there any truth to them? Did he in fact need Nicholas and Janette? Is that why he stayed in Toronto, do be near them? That couldn't be ... The hairs on the back of his neck lifted. It took him only a split second to realize what the cause was. He'd noticed Zavi looking at the sky only a moment before. The sky was starting to lighten with the approach of the dawn. "An interesting hypothesis, Zavi. But I think we'd better continue this conversation elsewhere, don't you?"

Zavi looked at him, dark eyes appraising him intently. "You know, I've always liked you, LaCroix. I've never understood why."

Not knowing quite what to say, which for him was unusual, LaCroix turned and started walking back toward the Porsche.

"LaCroix."

Turning back, LaCroix intercepted a missile aimed at his head. Plucking it from the air, he found himself holding the keys to the car.

"There's a brown envelope in the back seat. It has some things in it I'd appreciate you taking care of," Zavi said as he removed his black leather jacket, folded it neatly and laid it on the sand beside him. "The CD player has a message for you, just hit the play button. Actually, it's about you and Nicholas. You'll figure it out, I'm sure." Without saying anything further, Zavi turned his back on

his companion and stared off into the distance. The fog was beginning to lift and the gulls were starting their morning search for food.

LaCroix nodded even though Zavi was no longer facing him and walked back to the car. It had, he noticed, tinted windows. That would be necessary, since the sun had nearly risen. Climbing into the car, he adjusted the seat back and started driving away.

Zavi took a deep breath and folded his arms across his chest. He wondered how long it would take him to burn completely away but then turned his thoughts away from that. Thinking back over all the people he had known, the places. In his mind, Gustav danced one last time by candlelight. The song that he had danced to changed in Zavi's head. Part of the melody was similar, he realized with a slight smile. Maybe that's why he'd always liked that song so much. He began to sing softly to himself as the sun came up. *"I took a drive today, time to emancipate. I guess it was the beatings made me wise. But I'm not about to give thanks, or apologize ..."*

- "Rearviewmirror" by Pearl Jam

LaCroix pulled the Porsche into the indoor garage beneath his home. The windows were done very nicely, he had to admit, no sunlight had penetrated the interior of the car. Turning sideways, he reached into the back seat and pulled out the brown envelope Zavi had left him. Opening it, he found several deeds to houses, one a chateau in France where he had visited Zavi once, the registration and title for the Porsche, a list of lawyers and other people to notify. Not much, he thought, for over two thousand years of living. He was just about to get out of the car when he remembered the CD player. Hitting 'play' he wondered what it could have to do with him and Nicholas. The song filled the car. *"I know someday you'll have a beautiful life. I know you'll be a sun in somebody else's sky. But why, why, why can't it be, why can't it be mine?"*

- "Black" by Pearl Jam

(All songs by Pearl Jam)

Call for Papers

Kolchak: The Night Stalker

It had been a hot summer, tragically hot, and it promised to be a cold winter. He remembered hearing once that the average temperature for a region rarely altered more than a few degrees, so an especially hot summer almost always guaranteed an especially cold winter, keeping the average in line. He shivered at the prospect.

Right now, it was pleasantly cool as he sat on his front porch rocking gently in an old rocking chair. Summer had slipped away into autumn, and the trees were beginning to turn from brilliant green to equally brilliant crimson and gold. The children were back at school, affording him a quiet afternoon. His classes at University of Chicago were only in the evenings, lectures for continuing education students, or journalism students looking for what they believed to be an easy elective. He smiled to himself; they always thought his classes would be simple, easily aced. And they always walked away shaking their heads in wonder at just what they'd learned, and the grades he'd forced them to earn.

His days as an investigative reporter had ended more than a decade ago, and he still missed the excitement, the thrill of digging into a story and ferreting out the truth. The danger of facing down a dirty politician, or a crime boss who felt himself above the law. He'd had offers from various senior citizen publications, offers to write or edit or even manage, but they just weren't the meat he'd come to savor. Truth be told, it was a different world out there, a more violent world, a world with little place for an old warhorse like him.

So he taught the young ones. Taught them to believe in the truth, taught them to revere it above all else. They came to him with energy, and they came to him with arrogance. He taught them to harness that energy, channel it, and tame the arrogance into confidence and pride in honest work. Tony Vincenzo would've been proud, maybe, although he would've reached for his high

blood pressure medicine at some of the kids, and Emily ... well, Emily would've shaken her head over his methods, but she would have applauded his results. As for him, he'd found a way to pay back the profession he loved so dearly, to infiltrate the mass market media with men and women of honor, for whom truth outweighed the spurious pleasures of fame.

At least, he hoped so.

He reached over and picked up his glass of iced tea and smiled. All in all, Carl Kolchak enjoyed a rewarding retirement. He sipped contentedly and settled back in the chair to enjoy the afternoon.

A few minutes later, Joe Morton, his postal carrier, came up the walk, waving as he paused at the white picket fence surrounding Kolchak's front yard.

"Got anything for me today, Joe?" Kolchak called out amicably.

"Coupla circulars, *Columbia Journalism Review*, and an envelope, Carl," Joe replied, brandishing a small stack of mail toward Kolchak.

"Big envelope?"

"See for yourself."

Kolchak levered himself out of the rocking chair, ignored the complaints his body tossed at him, and walked to the gate to meet Joe. He accepted the mail with a smile, shared a few pleasantries with the mailman, and returned to his seat with his booty.

The *Review* he'd save for later, and the circulars weren't very interesting — he had no need of Windows '95, or any of its pricey accoutrements. But the large white envelope from Georgetown Institute ... He tore open the envelope, and pulled out a couple of sheets of paper. A hand-written note from Julianna Moorhouse was attached to a more formal form letter. He smiled as he read Julianna's note, nodding to himself. Then he turned his attention to the form letter and the tentative agenda attached. A paranormal conference, hosted by Georgetown Institute. Chaired by his old friend, Julianna. Well, well.

He'd followed her career with interest, subscribing to some of the more obscure anthropological

journals just to keep up with her work over the years. They exchanged Christmas cards, and he could always bank on a birthday card from her each year, but they hadn't seen one another in nearly 20 years. A long-distance relationship that had outlasted many of his local ones.

He'd been delighted to learn that she had finally achieved the lifelong ambition of starting a paranormal investigation unit at GI, although he'd been surprised at its members. Jonathan MacKensie's work was familiar to him through the journals he read, but Edgar Benedek ... well, he had to admit he'd read all of Benedek's books, and had a subscription to the *National Register*. Tabloid journalism at its worst most of the time, every once in a while they published something he suspected might be true ... and strangely enough, the byline was always Benedek's.

He could just imagine Julianna's reaction to someone like Benedek — he'd seen him on talk shows, and had even considered attending one of his book signings in Chicago. Under the hype and the hyperbole, there was an underlying current of belief and serious inquiry. He felt that if he'd had Benedek in one of his classes, Benedek might have been a first-class journalist, possibly even someone to carry on his work.

Because he could tell, through what Benedek wrote (and what he elected not to write), that Benedek really had encountered some of the strange nether-creatures that had so haunted his own career. He was of the opinion that some people acted as a kind of beacon to creatures of the dark — and those people found themselves constantly running into such things. People who were fortunate enough to be insensitive to that other plane went through their lives without ever seeing a ghost, without ever meeting a zombie. But if you had the proclivity, that extra gene that made you aware, they were everywhere.

And you could tell when someone else had the gift, or curse, or whatever you wanted to call it. Like that Mountie who guarded the front door of the Canadian Consulate, the one who never moved, never blinked, until his shift was over. People had their pictures taken next to him like he was some sort of cardboard cutout, and he never bugged a muscle, simply stared out into space, meticulously holding to his assigned position. There was something ... well, odd, he supposed ... about him. But you could tell that this was a man

who saw things, real things, that other people didn't see. Sometime he'd have to stop by at the end of the Mountie's shift, and see if he could draw him out. He suspected that the Mountie had stories to tell, stories that no one else would believe. Except him.

Julianna wanted him to write a paper on reporting paranormal events. He wondered what Benedek would make of what he had to say. So much of what he'd experienced over the years had never made it into the paper. So much that Tony had suppressed, because the publisher and the public simply wouldn't have accepted it. Maybe that was the tack to take — how to report on paranormal events when traditional journalism refused to credit those events. At what point does that reporting cross over into the merely sensational? Hmm. Perhaps they could do it as a "Point-Counterpoint" type of debate. Benedek had found his voice, his audience, but the cost had been his professional credibility among the public at large and the journalists who should have been his peers. Or had it? Who really read the respected papers and *didn't* read the tabloids? He knew he'd spied the *Register* and other papers like it more than once among the belongings of respected scholars.

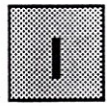
So many interesting questions rose out of this invitation in his hand. Perhaps he'd make it an assignment for his latest class — evaluating the impacts of tabloid journalism on the expectations of the reading public.

He chuckled to himself, and stood up. He'd call Julianna immediately and accept her invitation, discuss the possibilities with her. And then he'd start going through his files for tales to share, tales that had never been published. At last, an audience who would understand and appreciate what he knew.

THE REAL
GHOSTBUSTERS

Fashion Risk

by Sheila Paulson



It was a dark and stormy night. For those who take such things as omens and portents, it was darker and stormier than most. The shrilling of the telephone at Ghostbuster Central had to compete with the crash of thunder and fierce drumming of rain on the roof and windows. It didn't compete well. Only chance let Ray Stantz pass the phone as it rang, and he scooped it up in surprise, wondering how long it had been ringing. "Ghostbusters?"

"You've got to help me!" The voice on the other end of the line was panicked, and, as a result, cranky. The man sounded like he had scant patience with anything that didn't fit into his daily routine. "I'm being attacked by ... by ..." He went off into a babble of embarrassed incoherence, but after his years as a Ghostbuster, Ray was well used to sorting out such things.

"I see ... And then? Wow! Really? Gosh, we'll be right over." He jotted down the address and hung up. "Hey, guys, we got one!" he caroled happily, trotting across the second floor to join the rest of his team, who had given up watching TV when the cable had fizzled and gone out, and were now gathered around the dining table over a hand of poker. Slimer, their little green mascot ghost, had taken exception to the storm, and he hovered in fear beneath the table, grabbing Peter Venkman's leg every time a new crash of thunder shook the old firehouse, and clinging in terror. Peter was obviously not happy to serve as Slimer's security blanket. He kept jumping up and trying to shake him off, complaining loudly and trying to sic the little ghost on his buddies.

"Ray, it's raining buckets," he complained now, having gotten in plenty of complaint practice with Slimer. "You have gotta be kidding." He scooped up a handful of popcorn from the communal bowl, grinning over the one thing that was working in his favor that evening. Too terrified of the savage thunderstorm to pop out and raid the food, Slimer hadn't been that kind of pest all evening. Of course, Peter's pant leg was thoroughly slimed, but it was a small price to pay to keep the spud out of the food. He licked the

butter from his fingers with enthusiasm. Ray knew it been easy, each deal, to tell which cards Peter had held the last hand, and Egon Spengler, who had a great memory, had begun making his bets accordingly, though Peter hadn't yet noticed.

"It's an emergency, Peter," Ray said sternly, prepared to haul the psychologist to his feet and drag him along, protesting, if need be. "This guy's depending on us to help him. Besides, it sounds really different. Come on, guys." He gestured eagerly toward the stairs.

"It is what they pay us for, Peter," Egon pointed out reasonably as he straightened up and pushed his glasses into place on the bridge of his nose. They slid down a little immediately. Ray wondered if it was worth suggesting to Egon that he get them adjusted and decided it probably wouldn't be. Maybe Egon's nose was simply the wrong shape to hold glasses. *I wonder how Egon would look in contact lenses*, speculated Ray to himself.

Spreading his cards face down at his position, the physicist continued, "We can finish the game when we return." He and Winston Zeddemore hauled a reluctant Venkman to his feet, and Peter let them do most of the work, having to scramble for balance when they abruptly let go.

"Besides, Pete, you were losing," Winston reminded the brown haired psychologist with a grin. "You'd think you'd *want* to get away."

Peter glanced at the stack of poker chips in front of Egon, who always played poker scientifically, Ray, who made wildly enthusiastic bets and either won big or lost horribly, and Winston, who had been getting good cards all night, then he looked back at his own place where four chips sat in lonely splendor. "You do have a point," he said. For a moment, his eyes narrowed suspiciously as if he had detected traces of a conspiracy, then he shrugged resignedly. "All right, I'll be a martyr. If I get pneumonia, you guys better come visit me in the hospital." Looking extravagantly put upon, he let the others drag him down the stairs so they could don their jumpsuits.



His isn't fun, Ray," Peter couldn't resist complaining as they crept through the near-flooded, and consequently, near-deserted streets in their restored ambulance. "I ought to know. I've had fun, and it was never like this." In truth he was a little

uneasy. Visibility was way down and a nasty wind wailed between the buildings, not quite loud enough to compete with the full force of the thunder. Rain pounded so hard against the windshield the wipers couldn't begin to cope, and the momentary clear glimpses they got as the blades passed were immediately obliterated with the downpour, the drops almost as big as golf balls and splattering in near-explosions against the glass. The brilliant bursts of lightning gave them erratic visibility, plunging them into near-total darkness between bursts. A lot of the streetlights seemed to be out, and power with it. They'd been relying on the backup generator at headquarters for their poker game, and to keep the containment unit powered up. Peter was glad they'd been able to get into Ecto in the garage, and he didn't relish the thought of the mad dash into the client's house when they arrived. There were times when it paid to find the nearest no-parking zone.

"It's gonna be great, Pete," grinned Ray as he leaned over the wheel, the better to see down the tunnel of Ecto-1's lights. "It's not even that far. He said his clothes were attacking him."

"His *clothes!*" echoed Winston in disbelief from the "shotgun" position beside Ray. He glanced over his shoulder at Egon and Peter in surprise. "Haunted clothes? Give me a break!"

"It reminds me of the Garment District Incident of 1934," said Ray with a delighted smile. He loved to spring these weird, obscure "incidents" on the guys, and he knew one for nearly every contingency from symmetrical book stacking to pencils writing untouched by human hands. "A whole shipment of clothing was possessed and started dancing around Herald Square and finally marched up Broadway toward the Park. I wish I could've seen it."

"Somehow, I think my life is complete without the sight," observed Peter. Surreptitiously he felt for the umbrella they kept under the seat. If he had it first, he wouldn't have to fight the other guys for possession of it.

"It is truly fascinating, Raymond," Egon replied. He withdrew his hand from under the seat, clutching the umbrella, a faint smile on his face. Peter made a disappointed sound, then pretended he hadn't been looking. "Haunted clothing," Egon continued. "Perhaps this is an incident like that we encountered when the clothing we wore in our

battle against Gozer 'came to life' and tried to destroy us."

"I hope not," Peter commented with a grimace. "That was even less fun than this is. There can't be more than one Peter Venkman."

"Thank goodness for that," retorted Winston in delight, turning again to grin at the psychologist. "One's more than enough."

Peter stuck out his tongue at Winston's back the minute he turned away. "Yeah, Winston. Because you can't tamper with perfection."

"Oh, *right*, Peter," returned Ray, his voice full of mischief. "It was perfection we saw this morning when you started to get up and fell out of bed on your face? It was perfection when you dropped the laundry all the way down the stairs? We sure wouldn't want to tamper with perfection."

"Die, Stantz," Peter retorted, with a wicked grin. "So what are these nasty clothes supposed to be doing? The two-step?"

"Well, he said a scarf tried to choke him and his coat grabbed a lamp and threw it at his head. Isn't it great!" Ray was nearly bouncing with his excitement. Consequently, Ecto bounced a little, too.

"Great' is the last word I'd choose," Winston replied, dropping a hand on Ray's shoulder to settle him down. "It sounds like this bust could be dangerous."

"No, it doesn't," Peter jumped in, watching out of the corner of his eye as Egon set the umbrella on the seat between them and reached out for his PKE meter, starting to make careful adjustments. Carefully Venkman slid his hand sideways toward the umbrella, an inch at a time. "Those clothes may be tough, but they haven't come up against a thrower before. Pretty soon they'll be nothing more than a pile of old rags."

Egon bent over the meter, apparently completely absorbed. Peter's smile spread across his face, unnoticed in the dark. Almost there.

An instant before he would have grabbed the umbrella, Egon's hand shot down and picked it up, standing it on end between his knees. He didn't glance in Peter's direction as he began to

fiddle with the PKE meter again. Peter muttered, "Aw ..." under his breath.

"Possible, Peter, but there are other possibilities, too," Egon pointed out. "If you will recall the incident in Mrs. Faversham's Attic. That entity possessed clothing, among other things."

"You had to remind me of that," Peter said, remembering all too well his conversation with a hat and coat rack that had thrown energy charges at him. "You think we've got another imprisoned demon, Spengs?"

"Impossible to tell without taking readings. Did our client explain the circumstances, Ray?"

"Well, he said he bought this place and was remodeling the top floor. There was a walled off area, so he knocked the wall down, hoping to expand his living space. It was right after he did that when his clothes started to attack him." He brightened. "Gosh, Egon, there must have been something shut up in the wall!"

"Sounds like he loosed a demon all right," Winston groaned. "Man, I hate it when we have to do demons. I thought we were the *Ghostbusters*, not the Demonbusters."

Peter wasn't any keener on the idea of demons than Winston was, but he didn't like to go into a place without complete information. "What else did he say, Ray?"

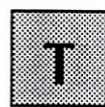
"That's about it. Only that we should hurry. We can get anything else we need from him when we get there."

"If he hasn't been squeezed to death by what he was wearing," Peter noted, grinning ominously. "I saw this movie once where a guy's suit shrank on him and killed him. Lousy movie, but it could happen."

"But that would be *awful*," Ray cried.

"You're right, Ray. Terrible," agreed Peter lugubriously. "He hasn't even paid us yet."

"Peter!" chided Ray and Winston in chorus as the occultist eased the car to the curb in an "emergency no parking" zone and added, "We're here."



Their client wasn't smothered or squeezed to death by his clothes after all. He was waiting in the entry hall of the building which, from the mailboxes just inside the outer door, was an apartment building. A tall, slender, dark-haired man in his mid-thirties, he greeted them with cries of relief, though his face still held traces of anxiety.

Peter, who had only managed to squeeze under a corner of the umbrella, felt cold and wet, trickles of rain sliding down his back. He was not a happy camper. But the man who opened the door for them to let them into the building looked even more unhappy than Peter did. "Thank God you've come," he gasped after Ray introduced them. "My name's Halloran, Paul Halloran. It was getting really weird up there."

"Tell us the circumstances," Egon said with interest. "Define 'weird'."

"Okay, yeah. I bought this building three months ago. Got a good deal on it, too, or so I thought at the time. I'm gonna keep renting out the lower floors and live on the top one, turn it all into one big apartment. So I'm measuring and laying out plans with the builders and next thing I know, they're telling me there's an area's been walled off. I think, great, more space, and from the layout, there could even be windows back there — it's an outside wall. I go out and look up and there are windows, but they're boarded up or covered up from the inside. Not much space, just maybe like one room. So I tell the builders, open it up. Maybe there's treasure there, maybe even somebody got murdered there and the body was walled up." He grinned. "That's what my girlfriend suggested anyway." He started down the hall to the elevator and ushered them into it. "Top floor needs a key," he explained, and fitted it in. Evidently he wasn't afraid to be up there with the *Ghostbusters* in attendance. The elevator doors slid shut and the cage began moving upward.

"So then what happened?" asked Winston. "Ray said your clothes attacked you?"

Halloran shook his head. "Not right away. The builders found a door behind the first level of plaster and forced it open. It was just an ordinary room, I thought. No dancing suits or anything like that. Some suitcases and a few odds and ends of furniture — a really great table, a steamer trunk, couple'a lamps from the thirties. I mean I'm

thinking antiques here and couldn't wait to get some of the stuff appraised." He grinned, but it faded when the elevator stopped. "Hey, listen, you guys can protect me from this, right?"

"That's what we're here for," Ray responded promptly. "Go on, tell us what happened next."

Halloran shrugged as the elevator doors slid open, to reveal an entry hall or foyer decorated with a table and potted trees on either side. "Come on in and I'll show you. But watch out. Those clothes are vile. They were all over me."

"That's where clothes are supposed to be," Peter muttered *sotto voce*. "Otherwise there'd be indecent exposure charges all over the city."

Halloran's mouth quirked reluctantly. "Not the ones I was wearing, Dr. Venkman. It was the rest of them. Well, not even all of them. I went through the stuff from the hidden room, and there were a stack of books and papers in one of the trunks. I put that in my closet until I could sort through it, you know, get it out of the way. I did that this morning before I left for work. I work in a publishing house, and I like books, so I wanted them out of the way of the builders. When I got home, I opened the closet and my best suit jumped at me. Scared the shit out of me," he added wryly. "I thought it was a burglar at first then I realized it was just the clothes."

"After that some of the other things in the closet came out, too. I managed to fight them off and slam the bedroom door, but I could hear them working at the door, and then a couple of things oozed out under it. I called you and went down to wait for you."

Peter wiggled his toes in his boots. They were unpleasantly damp. The entry hall seemed clear of attacking clothing, at least for the moment. "So where are they now?" he asked.

"In there, I think." Halloran pointed to a closed door, a wadded-up throw rug spread along the bottom. "They were all oozing out from under the bedroom door. This old building, whoever designed it must have wanted to allow for pile carpet or something when he hung the doors. I'm gonna redo them or the drafts are gonna kill me." He heard himself. "But with my luck, the clothes will do it first."

"Something in the books," Egon said to Ray. "If we could get to them — Mr. Halloran, did you notice what the titles of the books were?"

"No, only that they were old. I didn't want to try to open them because some really old books, the pages crumble if you handle them wrong. I know someone who's an expert and I was going to take them to him this weekend. I didn't think a few more days would hurt."

"Good call," Peter commented.

Halloran grimaced. "Well, how was I to know they'd turn my clothes into an attacking horde?"

"We still don't know that's what happened," Ray replied, "but I bet you're right. Maybe one of them is a book of spells — or maybe it was cursed or trapped a demon or ghost inside its pages. Maybe in moving it, the seal got loose like it did that time the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse were freed and nearly destroyed the world. That's a little different than clothes coming to life, but I think something must have got loose."

"You never had any trouble with ghosts or anything before, did you?" asked Winston.

Halloran shook his head emphatically. "No, and I hope I never do again. Wait! Listen!"

On the other side of the door, there had been a faint, muffled bump as if something not quite solid had flung itself against it. Almost immediately the sound was repeated.

"They know we're here," Peter said brightly. "They're quick. Egon, old buddy, what have you got?" He leaned his elbow against Spengler's shoulder and looked at the PKE meter in the physicist's hand. It was reacting with enthusiasm as if it were eager to take up the chase. Lights blinking at the end of its antennae, beeping, it was registering the presence of a spirit — or maybe several.

"Poltergeist energy, Peter," Egon replied, "or at least an analog of it. Very powerful. Class five, and multiple readings."

"You had to say that, didn't you?" Peter straightened up. "And they know we're here. They're going crazy in there to get to us."

"Isn't it great!" Ray's whole face was glowing with enthusiasm. "Haunted clothes." He put on the ecto-scopes, leaving the goggles up on his forehead, in preparation for entering the apartment.

"You may think it's great," Halloran complained. "You think I'll ever feel comfortable wearing those things again?"

Judging from his current outfit, Halloran had excellent taste in clothes. Peter had to admire the cut of his pants and the fit of the casual jacket he wore. "You could donate them to us for further study and testing," he offered. "We look about the same size. I could be guinea pig and test them all for you. A couple of weeks ought to do it."

"Ignore Mr. Fashion Statement here," Winston muttered. "So, Egon, what do we do? Go in blasting?"

"If this were normal poltergeist energy, perhaps, Winston, but I want to know more. If we could trap what we blast, fine, but that would suggest a finite number of ghosts."

"You mean it *isn't* a finite number of ghosts, Egon?" Peter questioned, alarmed. "We didn't bring an infinite number of traps, as you'll remember."

"I meant a definite number of conscious entities, Peter," Egon answered. He took out his particle thrower and made several careful adjustments on it. "What I am reading is more like a general overlay of PK power. It 'inhabits' separate articles of clothing and animates them, but each individual shirt or pair of trousers is not a complete, conscious entity."

"Okay, I get it, Egon," Ray burst out. "It's kind of like a group mind or collective consciousness or something like that. If we can find and stop the source of the power, all the clothes will revert to normal."

"Precisely," Egon replied. "We need to get to the closet."

"I knew he was gonna say that," lamented Winston. "Egon, you always say what I hope you won't. Why isn't this job ever easy?"

"It would be boring if it was easy," Ray pointed out. His thrower in one hand, he pulled the ecto-scopes down over his eyes. "Let's do it," he urged as he reached for the doorknob. Halloran retreated uneasily toward the elevator.

The four Ghostbusters slid into formation with practiced ease as Ray kicked away the throw rug and yanked open the door. As he did, a sweater shot out and wrapped itself around Ray's face. He staggered backward, grabbing at it and trying to peel it away with his fingertips, making muffled cries.

"That's not a good look for you, Ray," Peter observed as he grabbed for one of the sleeves to try to pull it free before the struggling occultist could suffocate.

"Yeah, man," agreed Winston, working his fingertips under an edge of the knitted material and attempting to draw it back. "You're supposed to tie it around your neck and let it hang down your back or something."

As Peter tugged on the stubborn sleeve that fought back with enough strength to suggest it contained an invisible arm, a pajama top in black silk dive-bombed Peter, the sleeves going around his neck and tightening. He let out a strangled yelp and dropped his thrower to tug it away. "Guys, it's got me!"

"Black silk is hardly the nighttime look for you, Peter," Egon replied. "Stand completely still. I'm going to try something."

Egon's thrower sizzled to life and Peter felt the sting of energy run up his back, realizing Egon had set the proton rifle at minimum power. It wasn't enough to de-possess the pajama top, but as the energy touched it, it let go with a weird noise and retreated to the doorway where the arms gesticulated wildly as if summoning the rest of Halloran's clothes.

"What's wrong with black silk?" Peter wheezed, trying to catch his breath. "I think I'd look great in black silk pajamas."

"Well, don't try to impress *us*," panted Ray. Luckily for him, the knit was loose enough that he could still breathe, though it was harder than normal. "Just get this thing off me!"



Peter gasped and sputtered, ducking involuntarily as Winston pried the sweater off Ray and flung it into the living room. It at once picked itself up off the floor, shook itself like a living thing and retreated to the center of the room.

"It doesn't like the proton packs," Egon said in Peter's ear. "Are you all right, Peter? I'm sorry I had to hit you with the thrower, but there should be no lasting effects. You shouldn't be neutronized at all, but stay quiet for a moment until your molecules adjust. There wasn't room to maneuver."

"Molecules adjust?" Peter echoed, appalled. "Are you saying I'm gonna dissolve or something?"

"Only if you talk too much," put in Ray with a quick grin to let Peter know he didn't mean it. "Gosh, those things were quick. It's a good thing it was a sweater and not something thicker or it could've smothered me. Are you okay, Peter?"

"I'm okay, aside from being deeply hurt that you guys wouldn't appreciate the elegant look. Hey, Egon, there's lots of room to maneuver – in there," Peter concluded, pointing reluctantly into the room, where shirts, pants, T-shirts, coats and even a pair of gloves or two hovered in a circle. It reminded the psychologist of nothing so much as a football huddle. The clothes were planning their next attack. "I don't like the look of that," he added. "It looks like a conspiracy to me."

"I think we can de-possess them at higher power," Egon suggested quickly. His thrower braced in the crook of his arm, he made rapid adjustments on his PKE meter and studied the results on the screen for each setting. "The center of the disturbance is in *that* direction," he concluded, pointing.

"That's my closet," Halloran called from inside the elevator. "I knew it was that stuff I put in there. Look, guys, I'm going back downstairs and wait for you. Do whatever you have to. The builders can repair the damages if there are any." He pushed the button and the elevator doors slid shut.

"So what do we do, rush the closet?" Winston asked, looking at the swarm of clothing hanging suspended in Halloran's living room. Every now and then, one garment would leave the "huddle" and dart toward the door, and, sensing the Ghostbusters, retreat again.

"First we blast *that*," Egon announced, pointing the tip of his thrower at the articles of apparel. "Wide dispersion, medium power. We'll try that and see if it forces the energy out of the clothing." The four men lined up just inside the doorway just as the clothes finished their pow-wow and lunged for them. "Fire!" Spengler called and the throwers sizzled to life in perfect unison at the same moment that the raiment attacked them.

The next few moments were not fun for the Ghostbusters. In the initial blast, several articles of attire stiffened in the streams then went limp and flopped to the floor, but they couldn't hit all of them, even at wide dispersion. A few things slipped away, avoiding the streams and coming around to assault them. A woolen scarf wrapped itself around Egon's head, covering his eyes, while a shirt wove in and out between Winston's legs, trying to trip him. Ray edged sideways, still firing and managed to snag a corner of the topcoat that had spread itself overhead and meant to come down over him and trap him, and the sizzle of proton energy took the "life" from the coat and it fell over Ray's head anyway, though without malicious intent. As he struggled free of the confining folds of material, Ray's thrower trashed a lamp and knocked the whole top row of books out of Halloran's bookcase.

Peter wasn't so lucky. He got a sneak attack from behind and only when he felt the empty gloves close around his throat did he realize what was going on. "Egon, I –" he squawked before the tightening pressure cut off his air and left him unable to speak.

Egon was still struggling with the scarf, and Winston, with an angry yell of protest, suddenly tripped and sprawled full length on the floor while the shirt tried to tie his ankles together. Wising up quickly, the black man made a hasty adjustment to his thrower and blasted it, then had to waste precious moments freeing himself from the knotted, but now unanimated, shirt.

"Egon!" Noticing the physicist's predicament, Ray jumped for him, grabbing the trailing edge of the scarf.

"Pull it away, Ray," Egon ordered as Winston started to his feet. Ray yanked hard, but that put Egon off-balance and he staggered back against the wall. Ray tightened his grip on the edge of the scarf and pulled it over the tip of his thrower, still

firing. Limp and unthreatening, the scarf came free of Egon, leaving his glasses askew and his hair wildly disarrayed. He shoved the glasses into place and his eyes widened in horror. "Peter!"

The other three turned then and saw the gloves. Peter was beginning to get dizzy by then, his thrower abandoned, his fingers prying at the vise around his throat. It felt like there were fingers in the gloves, fingers with astounding strength. He tried in vain to call out for help, but it was no longer necessary. Egon whipped up his thrower and, with a quick adjustment, did the job for him as he had with the black silk pajamas. The gloves dropped one lodging in his proton pack and the other sliding down his arm and landing on the floor.

Peter sank down to his knees, trying to suck in welcome breaths of air. It hurt, but it sure beat the alternative. The guys crowded around him in concern.

"This place is *dangerous*," he huffed breathlessly. "I've already been choked twice." He lifted his eyes to Ray, who was bending over him in alarm, adding accusingly, "And you said it would be *fun*."

"I thought it would be," Ray defended himself, clapping Peter on the shoulder. "I'm sorry, Peter. Are you okay?"

Before Venkman could reassure him, Egon cut in. "This does not look good, guys." He had his PKE meter out and pointed directly at Peter, who saw the gesture and flinched. The antennae quivered and the lights blinked, something Peter wasn't used to seeing when the subject under investigation was himself.

"So how long have I got, doc?" he asked in an elaborate parody of a man about to get bad news. "Or have I already crossed over? Come on, Spengs, what are you talking about? This does not look good."

"The only way to save you was to use the thrower, Peter, but if we keep doing that to free ourselves from the clothing, it will have a cumulative effect. You have already had more than your share of it. In other words, you can't be hit with the throwers again for at least twenty-four hours."

"Or?" Peter prompted encouragingly. He sat back on his heels and looked up expectantly at the physicist. He didn't like this at all.

"Or you could just – well – melt away, right Egon?" Ray burst out, eyes wide with horror. "Oh, gosh, Peter, that would be awful."

"I'll second that. How come I never heard about this interesting little side effect before now?" Peter demanded with heavy suspicion. "Egon, is this one of those things you never told us because you were afraid we wouldn't want to play if we knew about it?"

"Of course not, Peter. It isn't even a standard function of being accidentally blasted. We've all taken a few low power hits and lived to tell about it, and even a higher one once or twice, like that time you burned your arm, Winston. We all know enough to avoid full power hits."

"Yeah, or our atoms would go on separate vacations," Peter persisted, shaking his head, the motion reminding him of how sore his neck was. He massaged it thoughtfully as he continued. "Isn't that what you told us, Spengs baby? This job is dangerous."

"Of course it is, Peter. In this case, the problem is the result of not only the throwers but also the poltergeist energy that permeated the garments in question." He glanced around the room hastily as if to make sure a pair of jockey shorts or an old tennis shoe wasn't waiting to pounce on him and wrestle him down. "You'll be fine, Peter. It's simply that if you should be attacked again, we'll have to rely on manual rescue rather than the throwers."

"Okay, so listen up, gang. Everybody be *real* careful where you aim," Peter cautioned, glancing around at his buddies to make sure they knew how important it was. "Because it's not nice to neutronize Dr. Venkman." The black spots that had danced in front of his vision were gone now and though his neck was a little stiff he felt like he could stand up again. He started to scramble up and Egon and Ray each grabbed an arm and pulled him to his feet. "Hey, guys, they've all stopped. Think we won?"

That made the others survey the living room. Every article of clothing that had attacked them now lay draped over the furniture or in messy

piles on the floor. "It looks like your part of the bedroom, Peter," Ray said gleefully.

"It does not," Peter justified himself at once. It didn't do to let people get in that kind of zingers without refuting them. "Besides, I'm not the one that broke Halloran's lamp."

"It was an *accident*, Peter," Ray defended himself. He would have said more but Egon suddenly lifted a hand for silence, and there was something so ominous in the gesture that the others turned to him immediately.

"What, Egon?" asked Winston. "I don't like that look on your face, my man. This isn't over, is it?"

"No. In fact, if anything, it's worse. I'm registering a massive power buildup in that direction." He pointed toward Halloran's bedroom. The door was closed, but during the battle a few garments had oozed out beneath it to join the fight. Peter had kept an eye on it and nothing had come out since. "Whatever Halloran awakened when he tore down that wall is getting ready to make its own direct attack. This was just the first skirmish. I'm reading a full class seven entity now," Egon advised solemnly.

"Gee, Egon, you were only getting class five before," objected Ray as if that would disprove these new readings. "Is it like the time that huge ghost decided to absorb all the poltergeist activity in New York?"

"Similar, perhaps, but no, that's not what I'm getting. I think the entity could send out advance troops, extensions of its power, maybe, to see what was threatening it. Halloran wasn't much of a threat, so it only sent out the clothes. That was what came to hand and could be easily used. But it took power to do that. I should have guessed there was a major entity behind it. Those books Halloran found may be the real reason the room was sealed up. Once the entity was freed, whatever spell held it in place was broken."

"And now you say we have to fight it?" Peter asked without enthusiasm. "Is his furniture gonna start walking around now? Or do we get the real thing?"

"I don't know," Ray replied. "But it's coming. Listen."

Behind the door to Halloran's bedroom came a thud, then another one, a third. Footsteps, but heavy footsteps as if a sumo wrestler were about to spring out — or a gigantic demon. Class sevens were often demons and Peter didn't like them. "Hey, Egon, I've got a *great* idea," he offered with a grin. "Run away."

"We haven't even seen it yet, Peter," responded the blond impatiently. "Besides, these readings are interesting. They are identical to poltergeist readings — except they are class seven. I haven't seen that kind of energy display before. Perhaps what we have here is an animator."

"You mean a guy who draws cartoons?" Peter asked in surprise, though he knew that wasn't what Egon had meant. Egon's weird suggestions were always more esoteric than that.

"No." Egon paused long enough to frown at him. "I mean an entity that never shows its own form but instead brings other things to life. It doesn't possess living beings, but rather inanimate objects. As long as there is another object for it to possess, it can slip away from the one we're attacking and take over something else."

"Wow, that's fantastic, Egon," Ray burst out, intrigued by the possibilities. "We've heard of entities doing that before. Can we force it back into its own form and then trap it?"

"I'm not sure this one has a form of its own, Raymond," Egon replied as he compared readings on the PKE meter with those on his spectrometer. "Perhaps in its natural state it is merely unincorporated energy. It's animated something now, instead of sending out fragments of energy, the way it did with the clothes. That's why we can read its full strength. It may be rather like the entity in Mrs. Faversham's attic, though that had a natural form, and I'm not certain this does. Ray, we'll need the ecto-scopes. That may be the only way to trap it if it leaves whatever it's possessed now. You might be able to detect it with them when we couldn't see it with the naked eye."

"The way it threw all those clothes at it, the eye won't be the only naked part," muttered Peter. "I think we're about to find out what it is real soon. It's coming and it sounds pissed."

To prove it, a kind of animal howl sounded behind the door, then a heavy weight thudded

against it and withdrew. The door creaked and went silent, and, as all four Ghostbusters aimed their particle throwers at the door, the knob began to turn.

"Power up, guys," Peter called.

"Smoking!" the others chorused as they readied themselves for the attack.

The door flew open.

Half-expecting Halloran's bed to jump out at them, Peter was momentarily stunned by the figure that stood there. At first glance it looked like a normal person, clad in an elegant three piece suit with a yellow power tie and glossy black shoes. A homburg hat topped off the look which would have qualified the wearer for the front cover of *GQ*, except for one exception.

He had no face.

Hat resting on air, shirtsleeves enclosing no wrists, the figure took a step into the living room, paused there. An arm came up and an invisible hand adjusted the angle of the homburg.

"Hey, it's the invisible man," blurted out Winston.

"Wow," breathed Ray. "Look at that."

The non-existent hand slid into the front of the suit jacket and came out again, and this time a gun appeared, hovering in midair before the specter aimed directly at Egon, who was in the middle. Egon ducked just as the first shot rang out, and let out a stunned yelp as the bullet missed him by such a slim margin he must have felt it whistle through his hair.

"Look out, it's got a gun!" cried Peter and fired his thrower, dead on target — or where the target should have been. The entity was quick, and it darted sideways, the animated clothes moving with a lithe grace that would have suggested hours in the gym or dance training if he had been a living being. It fired again, and Ray yelped, but when Peter jerked his head sideways to see if his buddy had been shot, he saw that the occultist had dropped his proton rifle and was staring at it in dismay. The ghost had shot it out of his hand.

"Okay, Ray?" Peter called as he tried to keep firing at the ghost and make sure his buddies were

covered at the same time. Winston, too, was still blasting away, but Egon had dropped his thrower in his dive to avoid being shot and now he was hauling it back by pulling end over end on the power cable.

"Yeah, I'm okay," Ray answered back, lunging for his thrower and checking it carefully to make certain the bullet hadn't damaged it. From the way his face fell it looked like he didn't dare risk using it again. With a sigh, he unbuckled the pack, pausing once to drop to the floor as the ghost shot at him again.

"Let me make sense of this," Egon muttered thoughtfully as he tried to get a shot at the ghost. "Why would a class seven need a gun?"

"Because he knows it can hurt us," Ray replied immediately as if he were a bright student at his lessons. "And it doesn't expend any of its energy as it fights us off. It can use its whole power to resist the throwers. Look out, Winston!"

Zeddemore did a belly-flop behind the sofa as a bullet dug a hole in the fabric and sprayed out padding. "I don't like this, guys," he yelled in a voice full of outrage. "Nobody's paying me enough to get shot at."

"Yeah, we'll stick Halloran with a hefty bill," Peter concurred. "Blast it, will you *stand still*," he flung the words at the ghost. "Uncle Peter is tired and my feet are still damp from that rain and I've been choked twice. You might want to ease up on us, bunky."

"I wouldn't count on it, Pete," Winston countered. "That gun has a clip of 18 bullets. He can take potshots at us all day." He popped up over the edge of the sofa and took aim at the entity, his stream missing it by inches as the ghost waltzed back and forth as if it could predict their next movements. Maybe it could. Some ghosts could read people's minds. Slimer sure could tell when Peter didn't want him around, after all.

That gave the psychologist an idea. Carefully clearing his mind of anything but the thought of Slimer curled around his leg at the firehouse during the poker game, Peter pretended to lose interest in the fight. Maybe he could psych this ghost out, especially if it could tell from their body language, if not their actual thoughts, when they meant to take aim against it.

He was doing really well at this when a pained yelp from behind him coincided with another bullet, and he tightened up in alarm. "Egon? Are you hit?"

"Egon!" cried Ray at the same moment in a shocked voice. "He got you!"

"Easy, m'man," cautioned Winston. "Don't stop firing, Pete!"

"He shot me!" The physicist's voice was full of utter outrage as if he could not believe he could suffer such a violation. Peter risked one quick look over his shoulder and saw Egon clutching at his left forearm. A tiny smear of blood was visible between his fingers, but his face was drawn in taut lines and there was pain in his eyes. "It's only a flesh wound," he called reassuringly at Peter. "Don't stop firing."

As if following instructions, the specter raised the gun again. "He didn't mean you!" yelled Peter. Furious, the psychologist jerked up his thrower and fired at the entity without conscious thought. Maybe it was the unexpectedness of his sudden movement or perhaps his rage at the wounding of Egon masked his intent, but the ghost didn't counter the movement, and Peter's proton stream hit the gun dead center. The entity roared with savage anger but it "let go."

The gun slid from the specter's grasping "fingers" and landed on the floor at its shoes, and Peter dived for it before the ghost could attempt to retrieve it, scooping it up possessively. "Ghosts with guns are right up there at the top of Peter's list of least favorite things," he chided the entity. "Especially ghosts who shoot my buddies! Egon? I got the gun. Talk to me, big guy."

"I'm fine, Peter." He sounded it, too, but Peter knew shock could set in even in the case of minor bullet wounds. They had to finish this up pretty soon. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Egon had wrapped his handkerchief around his arm and was now engaged in tying it into place, pulling the knot tight with his teeth and the fingers of his good hand. He was holding his PKE meter without any effort in the hand of his injured arm, which looked like a good sign to Peter. Some of the tension eased from his stomach.

Above him the ghost shifted menacingly. "You will go now!" The voice came from the right

place, where its mouth would have been if it had possessed a mouth, but there was a curious, disembodied quality to it, almost an echo. As Peter scrambled backward in a hasty, undignified scuttle, the ghost grabbed for him with invisible hands, caught the strap of his pack in a tight grip and lifted him right up off the floor.

"Yaaaa!" was Peter's intelligent response as he struggled to free himself from this new indignity. Upwardly mobile young Ghostbusters shouldn't be treated in such a fashion. First choking, now being hauled around like a package. It was embarrassing. "Guys, he's got me. Get him off me!" Twisting up his face to meet the emptiness between the specter's collar and his hat, he retorted, "Don't you know it's impolite to wear a hat indoors? Geeze, somebody should've taught you manners."

The ghost shook him as if he were no heavier than a rag doll, and Peter's arms and legs flopped around as if he were filled with cotton stuffing. It hurt, and he tried to curl himself up into a ball to counter the worst of the effects.

"We can't risk firing, Peter," Egon warned. "Remember, if we hit you, we'll neutronize you."

"Well, s-s-s-someb-b-body b-b-b-better d-d-d-do s-s-s-something," Peter stuttered back, his whole body vibrating from the force of the shaking. He wrapped his arms across his chest and tucked in his knees, afraid the ghost would dislocate something in the process.

"He's gonna turn Peter into jelly if we don't stop that," Winston muttered, his thrower in hand but currently useless. "Come on, guys, *think* of something."

As if all it had required was Winston's urging, Ray snapped his fingers and dove forward under Peter in one fluid movement. The psychologist expected Ray to grab him and engage in a tug-of-war with the entity, but he didn't. He merely ducked in and ducked out again, then backed away, grinning maddeningly as if he had a secret he didn't want to share. "You're not so tough," he taunted the ghost. "Only can catch one of us! Not even a good shot! Nyah, nyah, nyah!" He darted close and then away again like a little boy teasing a bully. Whether in surprise or contempt, the ghost stopped shaking Peter, who tried to struggle free of the tight grip.

"Undo your pack, Peter," Egon coached him. "Wriggle free of it and get out of there!"

Peter reached for the strap across his middle, but before he could punch the release button, the ghost started to dart after Ray and, unexpectedly, pitched forward in a clumsy fall. Giving up on the release key as a bad job, Peter tried to get out from under the collapsed entity as the clothing constricted its movements and an unexpectedly heavy weight pressed him down, then there was a whoosh, a burst of energy that sent a tingle through Peter's entire body, and when that faded all that lay atop him were empty clothes.

"What h-happened?" he blurted as he dug himself free of them, struggling to free himself from the suffocating fabric.

"Tied his shoelaces together," Ray explained proudly. "He couldn't see what I was doing. He tripped. Long as he was in those clothes he had to fall."

"Yeah, but now he's not *in* those clothes," Peter pointed out, tossing the vest away. "Egon? Come on, Spengs, where did he go?"

"I'm not getting a reading, Peter," Egon called, then his face tensed and his whole body went rigid. "Now I am. There." He flung out his arm and pointed at the earlier-abandoned garments that lay scattered about the room.

As they watched, clothes rose up from the floor and came together, this time from everywhere with no attempt at matching or coordinating them. Peter saw a pair of jockey shorts mate up with the black silk pajama bottoms, an Izod sweater settle itself atop a tee shirt that read "Kiss me, I'm a publisher," (Peter had a sudden idea of getting one that said, 'Kiss me, I'm a Ghostbuster' and wearing it to places where beautiful women gathered) and a pair of high top tennis shoes fill with argyle socks. An old sailor cap that might be a leftover from Halloran's childhood settled on top of the entity's "head."

"Whoa!" Peter blurted out. "That's the worst fashion statement I ever saw. Wish I could get a picture of it. Compared to this, even Ray rates a GQ cover."

"Thanks, Peter," responded Ray, pausing to stick out his tongue at the offending psychologist then

collecting himself and whitening in shock. "Oh, no!"

"Oh, no what, Ray?" Peter demanded, spinning to see what had so unnerved the occultist. "You know I hate it when you say, 'oh, no'."

As the four Ghostbusters watched in horror, they saw Ray's abandoned proton pack rise up and settle itself against the back of the Izod sweater, the straps coming around as the arms slid into them, covering the little alligator patch.

"No, he can't use that," Ray cried. "It's broken. If he fires it, it could explode, or it could trigger a backlash. Peter get out of here. You're in real danger."

"Why *me*? We're *all* getting out of here," yelled Venkman. "Guns are one thing. Proton packs are —"

"He could neutronize you, Peter," Egon reminded him hastily, gesturing toward the door, just as the ghost shifted that way and positioned himself near their only means of exit from the apartment — unless they wanted to jump out a fifth floor window.

"Thanks, Spengs. Tell him all about it." Peter threw himself flat behind the sofa, knowing full well it was inadequate protection even against a normal burst of proton energy, let alone the destructive forces of a pack explosion. If that happened, he wouldn't have to worry about being neutronized, though. Such a catastrophic detonation would probably take out the entire city block, all four Ghostbusters with it. This was not how Peter had wanted to spend his evening.

"How badly was your thrower damaged, Raymond?" Egon asked practically as he adjusted his own proton rifle in preparation for defending himself.

"I couldn't tell. It was bent just enough to create a problem — you know, cause a backlash. I don't think it would allow normal energy flow and the feedback would trigger an explosion. It might be okay at lower power, but," he shrugged helplessly, "that won't help us now. If we could hammer it out once we got home, I think I could fix it."

"He's gonna fire!" cried Winston in alarm as the entity stretched up a sweater-clad "arm" and

reached for the thrower. Instantly three proton streams lashed out and hit the arm right on target. The ghost howled with rage and yanked itself sideways, drawing the sleeve right out of the streams. Though the ghost appeared undamaged by the concentrated blast of three streams at maximum power, the same couldn't be said for the sweater. Charred and smoking strands of yarn barely covered the ghostly "arm."

"Halloween's not gonna like that," Peter muttered. "It's not stopping him, Egon. What do we do? Can we run away *now*?"

"No. We can't get far enough if he fires. We have to prevent that at all costs."

"We need more power," lamented Ray, sounding frustrated at the lack of a weapon. "If only we had another pack. I don't remember, is there a spare in Ecto —"

"No time, buddy," said Winston, shaking his head. "You make a break for it, I don't know what he'll do."

"Our traps! Of course! Throw them out," Egon directed, his eyes lighting up as he saw a possible solution, and three traps thudded into place just in front of the horribly dressed specter. "Fire!" Egon commanded.

Years of practice enabled the three men to fire the particle throwers in complete unison, hitting the ghost mid-chest. It wailed and howled and started to slide backward out of the streams, unable to reach for its own thrower because of the energy it was expending in its fight to break free.

"Traps open," called Ray, bouncing around in excitement. He had the ecto-scopes in place in preparation for tracking the specter if it broke free of the outfit that placed it in contention for "Worst Dressed Sentient Being in the Known Universe."

Peter stomped on the pedal that opened his trap just as Egon and Winston did the same. All three of the miniature containment devices opened and the light was so bright he narrowed his eyes against it. "Get in the trap," he muttered under his breath as if his words could give the ghost the final push. "Get in the trap, you big ugly whatever-you-are."

With a scream and a burst of rage, the ghost resisted the pull of the traps, struggling fiercely to free himself. He was held in place, but he wasn't being trapped.

Egon held his thrower in one hand and his meter in the other. "Not enough power," he said, his face reflecting furious contemplation. "We need more power."

All at once an idea occurred to Peter, and he slid sideways, keeping his own proton rifle directed at the entity. Then, abruptly, as he got into position, he let out a yelp of sheer triumph, and directed his fire lower and to one side.

"Peter! What are you ..." Ray called, and then, with a whoop of delight as he realized what Peter was doing, he exulted, "Hey, yeah!"

Peter's thrower slid down the specter's side and hit his intended target. A burst of brilliant light shot out behind the entity, and it screamed, a truly horrible sound, so piercing it rattled the fillings in Peter's teeth and made him want to clap his hands over his ears, only he didn't dare stop firing to do so.

"What the heck ..." Winston blurted out.

"The fourth trap!" cried Egon in sheer delight as he saw what Peter had done. "The trap on Ray's pack. Well done, Peter!"

"Yeah, but only if it works," he hollered back, keeping his stream trained on the trigger of Ray's trap. "Is it enough, Spengs?" he asked anxiously.

"I think ... let me see ..." Egon began only to fall silent when the clothing abruptly went limp and folded in upon itself like dirty laundry.

"Yahoo!" cried Ray as the doors of all four traps slid shut, leaving the Ghostbusters blinking away the afterimage. "It's gone!"

As the three men stopped firing, Egon whipped up his PKE meter and made hasty adjustments. "Fastest PKE meter in the East," Peter caroled happily as the physicist studied the readings.

"Fascinating," Egon commented. "It's gone. There are only residual traces of energy now, most of them coming from the bedroom. I think we will

need to neutralize the spell or curse or whatever it was immediately."

"The ghost went in the traps," Ray announced in delight, pushing the ecto-scopes up on his forehead. "It just zipped right in there. I could see it – well, almost. Parts of it went into all the traps. It looked like a really fine mist, but it went in. I know it did. We got it!" Hurrying over, he scooped up his abandoned proton pack and studied the ghost trap. "See, it's full!" he said, pointing to the blinking light that indicated an inhabitant. "We got him." He shut down his proton pack in relief. "Gosh, Peter, I was afraid he'd fire and neutronize you and your molecules would be all over the city."

"The idea crossed my mind, too, Ray," Peter replied drily. "This was not fun. I told you it wouldn't be, but who ever listens to me. Hey, Egon, you okay?"

Winston had seated Egon on the back of the sofa and already checked Egon's makeshift bandage and he looked up at Peter's question. "It's not bleeding any more, but we can stop and have somebody look at it on the way home just to be sure," he suggested.

"Excellent, Winston, but first we must examine that closet." Egon rose and led the way into the bedroom.

Halloran had a waterbed, a huge one, and the closet was of the walk-in type. Peter pulled open the door carefully and peered around its edge, thrower in hand just in case. He didn't want to find himself under attack from shoes and ties. When nothing happened, he relaxed.

"What a mess," he announced self-righteously, pointing to the pile of clothes on the closet floor. "Even I hang up my things better than that."

"Sometimes you do," Ray replied. "I've seen your closet look worse than that, and the way you leave smelly old socks –"

"Let's not pick on Peter," Venkman said hastily, digging around in the clothing with his foot. "Egon, is this what you want?"

Egon leaned in and held the PKE meter over the stack of books Peter had unearthed with his toe. "Exactly," he agreed when the meter's antennae

stirred to life. "Residual effects. Apparently opening the wall released the entity, but it was confined in here long enough that we can detect the aftereffects of its presence." He lifted out the books carefully and spread them on the waterbed, staring at the titles.

"Wow!" Ray leaned over them, eyes glowing. "These are *great* books. Carleton's *The Undead*. A first edition of *Spirit Control*. This one's in some language I don't even recognize. Egon ..."

"Rumanian," replied Egon without hesitation. "Hmm. This is interesting. *Blood of the Undead, a Treatise into the Capture and Containment of Vampyric Energies*. I have wanted to read this for years."

"That wasn't a vampire we fought, was it, Egon?" asked Winston, scratching his head.

"No, but it might possibly be the end result of an experiment to destroy a vampire. The energy might have lingered, though I doubt it. No, more likely a demon. Note this book." He touched one of them with the tip of his finger. *Binding Rituals for the Solitary Practitioner*. A very dangerous book. I thought all copies of it had been destroyed at least forty years ago. I wonder when the wall went up. This building looks like it might have been built when? In the Twenties? Then that would work."

"A book so dangerous all copies were destroyed?" Peter stared at the innocuous green binding in surprise. "I don't think I want it in our library."

"Gosh, Egon, Peter's right. We'd better destroy this one, too," said Ray with only mild reluctance. "I've heard of the trouble it caused. There was even a whole village in the Alps that was buried under an avalanche when somebody tried to use it there. Is this the one that contained the entity?"

"Yes." Egon took careful readings of the volume in question. "The problem with this book was that it made too much power available to the uninitiated. Those who were beginners or dabblers in witchcraft were tempted to try spells beyond their capabilities. Calling up a spirit is always risky because the spirit may be too powerful to be held in the binding. In this case, I should say the solitary practitioner in question realized that in time and managed to seal it within the book."

Probably as a further safeguard he or she put up the wall around it in hopes of confining it."

"But any coven could have helped ..." Ray's voice trailed off. "Some of those who try things on their own don't even know where to find a coven. There's nothing else trapped in there, is there, Egon?"

"Nothing. We shall have to put it in the containment unit once we reach home."

"Can I read it first, Egon?" asked Ray hopefully. "Do you think it's safe enough for that? I wouldn't try any of the spells."

"No!" chorused the other three in perfect unison.

"Well, I think it would have been nice," Ray finished. "I might have learned all kinds of things that could have helped us in our job."

"No doubt of that, Raymond," Egon replied. "But whether any of them would have been nice, I should be inclined to doubt. The risks far outweigh any possible benefits." He scooped up the books in his arms. "Gentlemen, let's go home."

When Halloran had returned warily to his apartment to put his things into order again, the Ghostbusters went out into the night, the publisher's check in Peter's pocket. During the battle with the entity, the storm had stopped and only a few stubborn raindrops still fell. Faint thunder muttered in the distance, but it was receding. Streetlights had come on again, and people had ventured out, so the Ghostbusters faced heavier traffic on their way to the nearest hospital.

The doctor who checked out Egon recognized his injury as a gunshot wound, and forms had to be filled out and a policeman on duty at the hospital came to ask them questions. Someone would probably stop by Halloran's apartment and check out the gun. By the time a small dressing had been put in place over Egon's very minor wound and the four men were finally free to go home, the rain had picked up again, though the thunder and lightning were gone.

"See, I'm gonna get wet all over again," Peter complained as they piled hastily into Ecto and tried to shake away as much of the wet as they

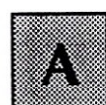
could. "I knew it. Why don't we ever get busts on nice, sunny days?"

"Because then you'd complain about wasting nice sunny days to chase ghosts," Winston retorted. "Never mind, Pete. You didn't get neutronized, Ray's pack didn't blow, Egon's bullet wound is only a scratch, and I'm fine. We came out of that pretty well."

"Yeah and nobody tried to choke you twice or shake you to pieces," Peter objected. "Or took many potshots at you either, Zed. How do you rate?"

"I know how to duck, m'man," Winston replied with a crooked grin at Peter in the rear view mirror. "I learned *something* in 'Nam, after all."

"And here I thought I had great reflexes," Peter mourned. "Makes a guy wonder."



At least they didn't have to get wet again when they finally reached home. The automatic doors opened to let them into the firehall, and, much to Peter's dismay, the only threat left was Slimer, who had, in their absence, cleaned up the rest of the popcorn. "Nasty thunder over," he announced brightly. "Guys make more popcorn. Slimer still hungry."

"Yeah, figures," Winston replied. "I'm up for some popcorn myself and then we can finish our poker game. What do you say, guys?"

"Sure, Winston," Peter answered as he unzipped his still-slightly-damp jumpsuit and wiggled out of it, sitting down to pull off his boots along with the brown uniform. Clad only in his socks and grubbies, he reached down to brush away traces of dried slime from his pajama leg.

To his surprise, the gesture started the other three laughing as if they'd never seen a funnier sight.

"What?" asked Peter, straightening up in surprise. "What's funny?" Eyes narrowed, he stared from Winston, whose eyes were bright with mirth, Egon who, when he noticed Peter watching him, took off his glasses and proceeded to polish them on the tail of his pink shirt as if to distract him from the way the corners of his mouth kept turning up, and Ray, who was giggling happily. "Come on, guys. Tell Uncle Peter the joke."

"What was that you said earlier about a fashion risk, Peter?" Egon asked in carefully serious tones. "Perhaps you had more in common with the ghost than you are willing to admit."

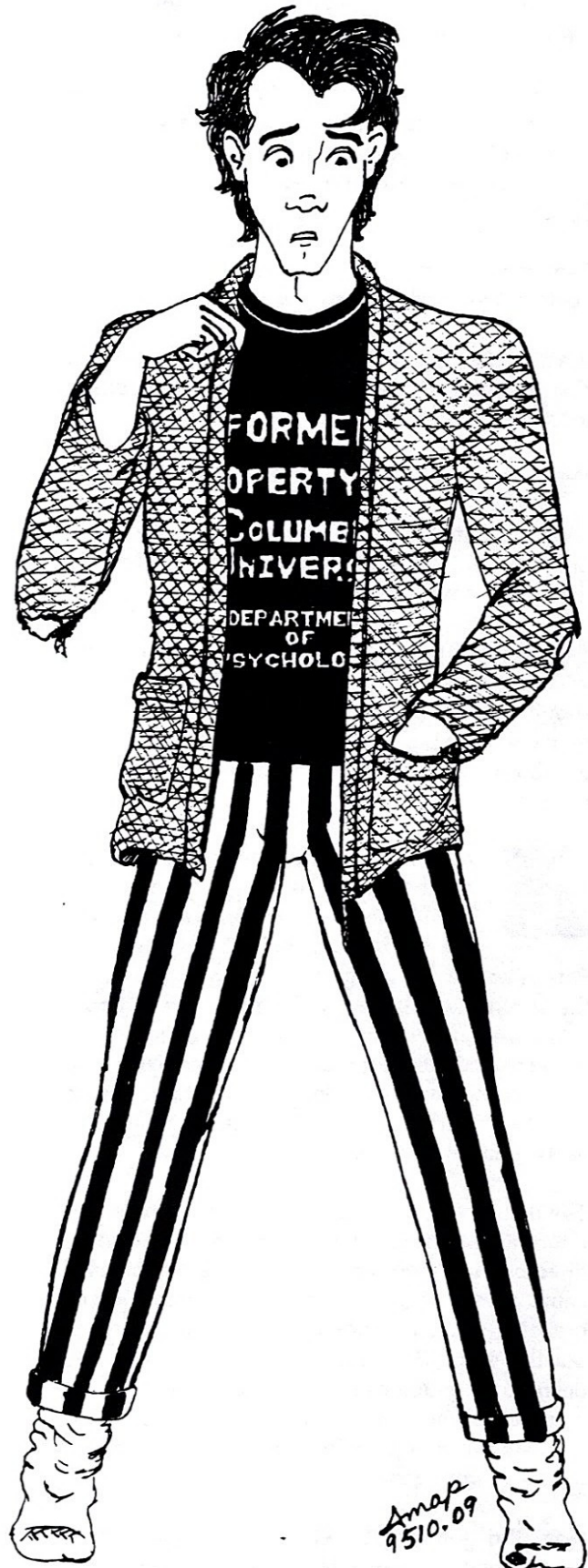
Peter looked down at himself in horrified realization. He was wearing pale pink sweatsocks that had been white until he had accidentally put them in a load of wash with a red shirt of Ray's, blue and white striped pajama bottoms, a tee shirt that read, "Former Property of Columbia University Department of Psychology," and an old cardigan sweater in garish browns and greens he'd inherited from his dad when he was about sixteen that had holes in the elbows and a lot of pulled threads. He wore it mostly on chilly nights around the firehouse because it was warmer than it was ugly.

"Yeah, Pete, you give that ghost a real run for his money," Ray said gleefully. "Up until he got to know you, he was doing really great in the fashion department. I think you corrupted him."

"Die, Stantz," Peter growled, starting for the spiral staircase that led to the third floor.

"Where are you going, Peter?" Egon asked in a voice that was close to laughter.

"Uh, I've gotta run upstairs for a minute," Peter replied hastily. "Something I've gotta do." While his buddies chuckled behind him, he hurried up to change his clothes. After all, he had a reputation to maintain.



Call for Papers



"Yo, Jon-Boy!"

Jonathan MacKensie felt his heart sink to his knees. No, lower. It was dribbling out the toes of his argyle socks. He closed his eyes, counted to ten, and wished upon a star. He opened his eyes, and sighed. "You're really here."

"Yeah, ain't it great?" Edgar Benedek grinned at him. Benedek was a study in conflicts — his loud Hawaiian shirt conflicted with everything MacKensie believed in. Not to mention his obnoxious personality, his slicked-back thinning hair, the beneath-contempt rag he worked for, his bizarre menagerie of friends and "specialists," and his aptitude for finding ways to charge expenses off to the Georgetown Institute of Science. In point of fact, Jonathan MacKensie couldn't think of a single reason not to throw Edgar Benedek out of his office.

"Why y'lookin' so glum, chum?" Benedek asked, perching himself on the edge of Jonathan's desk. "Ironclad Moorhouse got you down?"

"Benedek ..." MacKensie warned, more out of habit than any real feeling. If forced to admit it, it wasn't Benedek who was getting him down ... it was in fact his department chair, the redoubtable Dr. Julianna Moorhouse. Or rather, her latest pet project.

"What? She here?" Benedek glanced up at the ceiling, made a show of checking the non-existent rafters, and shook his head. "Nope. No vampire bats here, boyo."

"Why are you here, Benedek?" MacKensie sighed, dropping his head onto his crossed forearms.

Benedek slid a large white envelope onto the desk, nudging it so that it rested right in front of MacKensie's face. "Why do you think, Jack-o?"

Jonathan raised his head slowly, a chill spreading to his extremities. Dr. Moorhouse had invited him personally, but he hadn't dared ask if she was planning to invite Benedek ... the thought that she might say, "Yes," was simply too frightening to contemplate. And now ... "She wouldn't ..."

"Nuh-uh. She already did."

"But this is meant to be a scholarly forum —" MacKensie protested, trying to avoid looking at the GI logo on the envelope.

"Which is why she invited *me*," Benedek announced, grinning proudly. "Who knows more people in the field than yours truly?"

"I wouldn't call all of them people," MacKensie muttered.

"Watch it — Hortense gets really frosted when people think she's just a puppet. Puppets have feelings, too, you know."

"I wasn't talking about Hortense, Benedek," Jonathan warned darkly.

"No? Then I'll let her know to take off that curse she just sent you special delivery from Jersey. She and Zabo are doing the clubs in AC. Knockin' 'em dead, Dr. Jack!"

"How can you tell?" MacKensie demanded blearily.

"Hey, c'mon, Jon-boy — this conference is gonna be a blast. Have you checked out the guest list yet?"

"Guest list? She hasn't released the guest list — Benedek, what have you done now?"

"Just a little digging, pal o' mine." At Jonathan's stricken look, he relented. "Okay. I asked Liz. She let me take a look at the invite list. You know that the secretary is always the seat of power in any office."

"Did you lay it on that thick with her?"

"Lay what on? It's true — any time you want to know what's going on, go to the secretary. They always know first, and their info is primo. C'mon, Jon-boy — everybody knows that!"

Jonathan squirmed a little guiltily. Now that Benedek had pointed it out, he realized that it was true in every department on campus — the secretaries controlled the flow of information, schedules, even whose tenure applications were reviewed in what order. He looked up at Benedek with a renewed respect. "So who's been invited?"

"The list is incredible. There're a couple of cops who've been invited — one in LA who had a near-death experience a couple of years back. Another who only works the night shift — what does that tell you about him, huh? And another whose dad is a Shaolin priest — imagine that! Kung fu cops. Coupla FBI agents — the X-Files division. Now, you wanna talk weird stuff? I've seen a few of the files they send to the X-Files — we're talking stuff even Jordy won't print, and it's for real. Real paranoia stuff. And get this — Old Battleship Moorhouse has invited Carl Kolchak. *Carl Kolchak!* The man's a legend! Man, I've been dying to meet this guy all my life, but I've never had the nerve to get in touch."

"You've never had the nerve — what *is* this man? One step down from God?"

"In the field of paranormal journalism, Carl Kolchak *is* God, Jack," Benedek told him loftily, eyeing him suspiciously. "C'mon — you've never heard of Carl Kolchak?" MacKensie shook his head mutely. "Your education is lacking, Doctor J, Ph.D. or no Ph.D. 'S'okay — I'll check out some of his stuff and you can bone up. Guaranteed the library here on campus has copies of his work."

"The library here on campus is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge," MacKensie corrected archly.

"Yeah. Tell that to the kids playing games on the Internet. Or downloading pictures of Teri Hatcher from Web sites. Now, the one some bozo in Oshkosh posted last week — that was worth the price of a download —"

"Benedek ..."

"Okay, okay!" Benedek capitulated, holding his hands up to forestall any further complaint from MacKensie. "The point is, this conference is going to be A number one primo stuff. Pity Moorhouse won't let me cover it for the *Register*," Benedek added sadly.

"No?"

"No. No press allowed. Now, I'm sure I can set up some interviews off campus, but it's not the same, y'know?"

"Hmm."

"And she's given me a list of who she wants me to bring."

"She *wants* you to bring people?" Jonathan fairly squeaked. "People you know? Not Boom-Boom —"

"Nah. But some of the folks in the business, sure. No expenses, but I know a couple of people who'd do it gratis, just for the chance to talk to an interested audience. I was thinking maybe a cabaret, too, y'know, give Hortense and Zabo a chance to really show their stuff. Maybe Melody, too — that wall-feeling act'll bring the house down! Maybe I *should* invite Boom-Boom —"

"Benedek!"

"Hey, c'mon — what's a conference without a little partying?"

"Benedek ..."

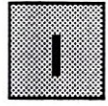
"I mean, after all — who's Moorhouse gonna put in charge of entertainment other than you and me — well, me, anyhow —"

"Benedek!"

As MacKensie chased Benedek down the corridor of the Cultural Studies building, he felt better than he had all day. There was something synchronistic about having Dr. Moorhouse plan his worst nightmare and throttling Benedek all in the same day ...

House Of Gingerbread

by Mary Robertson



I really should have suspected something. The house was cheap, too cheap even for a long-abandoned fixer-upper. Maybe it was the fantastical quality of its turrets and gingerbread, the chance to own my very own clapboard castle, that sent my practical side on holiday; maybe it was just the heat. Some things transcend the bounds of logic. So it was with the house. Whatever the reason, the Queen Anne gracing the corner lot among its overgrown lilacs and ivy-covered maples was no longer just another aging white elephant – it was mine.

I couldn't move in right away, of course. It took time to counter years of neglect, time to substitute elbow grease and aching muscles for the mountains of money professionals would have charged for the necessary repairs. My new home boasted antique wiring and a plumbing system that was primitive even by Neanderthal standards. Still, it was a magnificent building. Even in the throes of old age, it wasn't hard to see it had once been splendid. A visit to the town library told me the house had been built by a long-ago mayor for his wife and had been the scene of frequent lavish parties until her premature death a few years later. It was even supposed to have a resident ghost, a white lady who prowled silently through the halls on dark, windy nights. I wondered if I would ever see her. Gazing at the cracking leather walls and begrimed parquet floors, I could almost envision the opulence of past glories. My oldest jeans and sweatshirt seemed out of place in my daydreams of velvet gowns and diamonds. But, I reflected, jeans were just right for removing years of accumulated grime. Who's to say the servants back then wouldn't have worn jeans if they'd had them?

Considering my fantasies of ball gowns and ghosts, it seemed somehow appropriate that I took up official residence on Halloween. All Hallows' Eve. I wandered from room to room, sometimes turning on the lights, sometimes relishing the darkness, always swelling with the pride of possession even if those rooms were for the most part echoing empty and still in need of attention.

Before the move, I had lived in a small apartment. The sum of my possessions was hardly noticeable in the vastness of this new, substantially larger space. I hadn't really had much chance earlier to explore my new residence so involved was I in making a few rooms liveable. And so I wandered, exploring.

It was late. An October wind whistled bleak along the darkened streets swirling dry leaves against the wrought iron fence rails with a dry-throated hiss and rattling barren branches against the clapboards. I hugged my voluminous flannel robe tighter against me as if to protect me from that hungry wind, and climbed the narrow back stairs. I had paid scant attention to the highest stories until now, to those turrets and gables that so attracted my attention at the outset. My robe would need washing after this, I mused, poking my head in and out of dusty alcoves and cubbyholes.

At last I found myself in what I had dubbed the tower, a small, circular room a full story above the rest of the house. Its windows looked out over the town with an almost proprietary air. The view in the full light of day was magnificent, but tonight I saw only a spattering of stars and the dim glow of a cloud-darkened moon. The room was cold, achingly cold and damp. I shivered against a sudden chill and reached for the light switch.

The chamber flared to watery yellow light under my questing hand. Unlike the rooms on the lower floors, this little hideaway had remained virtually untouched by antique scavengers down the years. Of course the bits and pieces here did not have the quality that had made the lower chambers a gold mine for collectors and dealers. These pieces of the past were scarcely valuable – a scarred writing table, a chair whose rush seat was frayed and broken, an old dresser with a mended leg, a chipped chamberpot. How I'd ever manage to get them down the winding stairs I didn't know.

Besides the furniture, there were a few other oddments; a book or two, a box of postcards – No, wait. The long-forgotten memory of a visit to my grandmother's house surfaced. They weren't just strange postcards, but stereoscope cards, their twin images merging into a three-dimensional whole when seen through a viewer. Curious, I shuffled through the stack, seeing the usual beach scenes and country idylls. Then I paused. Staring up at me was not a generic travel shot, it was my

house, this very house on some long-past Halloween. The revelers were masked in the manner of their day, the trees looked different, younger, but the house was unmistakable. The next shot also showed the house, but this view was of the main hall and the sweeping central staircase. A party was in progress, and all eyes were focused upward on some indistinct figure about halfway down the stairs. I was struck by an overwhelming need to see this card in all its multi-dimensional glory. Anxiously I searched the room for the stereoscope that certainly couldn't be too far away. There it was! The strangely familiar viewer felt comfortable in my hand as I picked it up and dropped the card into its wire rack. I raised the tin eyepiece ...

I must have drifted off, standing there in the cold, for I started suddenly, shivering as if some unknown wanderer had crossed my grave. Droplets of promised rain spattered the windows. Inexplicably uneasy, I gathered up my booty and decided to abandon the dusty tower for the comfort of clean sheets and a good reading lamp.

Creeping, although there were none to see or care, I wound my way back down to the second floor — where I stopped dead. The broad hall that stretched from front to back had been echoing empty not an hour before. Now ornate stands laden with gigantic vases of leaves and chrysanthemums graced each shallow alcove. A rose-patterned runner stretched the length of the corridor, and gas lamps danced their wavering shadows across the walls. They hardly registered, these impossible furnishings, for there came from the stairwell a murmur of voices.

Those voices stirred something deep inside, some primitive territorial instinct that sublimated any more sensible idea like calling the police from the safety of a locked bedroom. Setting my new-found toy on the nearest table, I hastened to the main staircase and plunged downward.

My steps slowed as the entrance hall came into view, and my angry shout died unborn. The scents of gingerbread and cider, mulled wine and melting candles assaulted my nose. I stared down at a roomful of shadowy masked figures, the furniture of an earlier era clearly visible through the rainbow of silks and velvets. One snow-clad debutante raised a hand to her throat and pointed. "A g-ghost!" she gasped before swooning prettily into her dancing partner's arms. The man swore

and turned to see what had so disturbed the fragile miss. He turned and looked straight at me.

"My word! It is a ghost!" I heard him exclaim and saw heads twist in my direction.

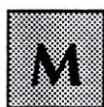
There was a blinding flash. Then the room turned to smoke and darkness.

I came to myself in the tower, stereoscope still clenched tight in my hand, postcard still wedged in its assigned place. "What a weird dream," I thought, shaking my head to clear it and breathing deep to still my racing heart. It had seemed so real —

Carefully switching off the light, I left the tower to the spiders and fled downstairs, still clutching the scope. All I wanted now was bright light and the comfort of my own possessions on all sides. It had to have been a dream. Ghosts didn't exist, except maybe for the writers who create them. Ghosts were figments of the imagination. Ghosts were — By this time I had reached the second floor. And stopped dead. There on the naked boards of the hall floor was the box of postcards. As I stared, a thin ribbon of moonlight touched it and for just a moment I imagined I could see the rose-patterned runner —

With a terrified whimper, I ran to my bedroom and locked the door behind me. This couldn't be happening. It just couldn't. I raised my hand to pinch myself awake, only to encounter the forgotten stereoscope. It fell to the carpet with a dull thud.

The antique toy spent the rest of the night there on the bedroom floor. I spent the night in a chair on the other side of the room, watching it. Nothing happened. It didn't suddenly turn into a snake or rise up and fly around the room or burst into flame. It just lay there where I had dropped it, an innocent toy abandoned by its owner. Or was it?



My courage returned with the light of day. The night-long vigil had given me plenty of time to think, to find all the logical explanations for what had happened. My tiredness, the atmosphere of the old house, the weather, the time of year, all had combined to make my dreams especially vivid, to disturb my slumber to the point where had I prowled as restlessly unaware as the ghosts I had envisioned. I had sleep-walked before, why not last night? I myself must have dropped that box in

the hall during my somnolent flight from the tower to my bed. I simply didn't remember. Steeling what was left of my nerves, I ventured finally to pick up the scope and yank the postcard from its holder. Tossing the toy onto the bed, I glanced down at the picture in my hand and gasped. The figure on the stairs was no longer indistinct. It was me.

What is time? Is it a river flowing in logical progression from source to sea, from past to future? Or is it a chaotic everpresent now with only human need and will channeling it into those orderly patterns we assume it found on its own? I used to take those patterns for granted, but then I never used to believe in ghosts.

I still don't believe in ghosts, at least not those ectoplasmic chain rattlers that shout "boo" and jump from behind closed doors, but I do believe in shadows, the shadows of the past and of the future. It's been a year now. Sometimes, as I wander my house in the fullness of night, I see those shadows; I see faces on figures that twirl to long-forgotten music and moonlight making silver puddles on a phantom rose-patterned rug in the upstairs hall. And sometimes, on those nights when a hungry wind whispers under the eaves and rain-dark clouds cover the moon, when my restlessness sets me to wandering, on those nights a wild-haired shadow walks. And somewhere in the past, the white lady's ghost is seen haunting this house of gingerbread.

Call for Papers

THE TOMORROW PEOPLE

It felt strange to be back on Earth after so long. Despite the noise of the traffic, the street vendors, the people themselves, it was curiously quiet. Oh, the external sound level was deafening, but inside, where he'd grown used to the muted sounds of thousands of minds muttering in the background ... it was silent.

So much had changed, and yet so little. When he and the other Tomorrow People had left Earth for the Galactic Trig almost twenty years ago, London had been in the midst of its disco age. As young men with sideburns and multi-colored shirts passed him, he found himself wondering if nothing had changed, or if it had come full circle in his absence. A group of young women clustered in front of a storefront, their dress recalling the freewheeling '60s. And over there, at the telephone kiosk, was a businessman with a severe haircut and an exquisitely cut suit. As if all the ages of the twentieth century had come together on this street ...

He shook himself. Culture shock. It was inevitable. How strange, though, to find himself having difficulty readjusting to being surrounded by his own kind, when he'd had so little hesitation in fitting into a society made up of hundreds of races, few of them humanoid.

Then again, the Saps weren't his kind, not quite. He looked like them, shared many of their values, their tastes. But unlike the people who surged around him, he was a member of a new race, *homo superior*, the Tomorrow People. And after twenty years away from Earth, he'd come home.

Twenty years ago, the evolutionary imperative had seemed to stop, and there were no new Tomorrow People breaking out. Military researches into ESP and other psi-powers had prompted the Galactic Trig to remove him and his companions to the safety of the Trig's home base. A ship had been

placed beneath the surface of a southern sea, to monitor psi levels during their absence, and until a few years ago, it had registered nothing. But now, there was a new generation of Tomorrow People coming into being, and the incredible mind of that ship was guiding them on their path.

The ship's computer was nothing like TIM. It was an alien mind, created by alien telepathic engineers. By all accounts, it did its job well, and the new Tomorrow People were developing satisfactorily. But it was time for them to meet one of their own kind, to learn more about their place in the galaxy. And for that, he'd returned.

He found himself near the entrance to their old lab and smiled. He could easily have jaunted here, saved himself the last hour of walking through London. But he'd wanted to get the feel for being among normal humans again. At nearly 40 years old, he no longer needed the jaunting belt to assist him in teleporting himself into the lab, or across the galaxy, but he'd put it on out of a strange sense of nostalgia. He'd never been far from TIM's telepathic contact in the last twenty years, but it would be good to see his old friend, to touch the softly glowing bubbles of TIM's fascia again. He wondered briefly if this new generation of Tomorrow People felt the same need for the physical that he did.

He stepped behind a hoarding and touched the control on his belt. For the first time in many years, he felt the jaunting field form around him, the curiously intimate touch of TIM's mind as he took control of the jaunt. Then he was standing on the jaunting pad in the old lab, staring up into the multi-colored display of TIM's physical self.

"It is good to have you home again, John," TIM welcomed. "Did you have a good trip?"

"Fine, TIM. You'll have to bring me up to date on what's been happening while I've been gone," John answered, glancing around him. "You've kept the place up well," he added, noting the lack of dust and cobwebs throughout the lab — in fact, it looked as clean as the day they'd left.

"Thank you," TIM replied with a trace of pride. "A simple matter of teleporting any foreign matter directly to the rubbish tip. Although I did have a boarder at one time — a lovely little ginger cat. She found a good home with a local bobby, but every so often, she comes back for a visit."

"And a saucer of milk, no doubt," John chuckled.

"One must be hospitable to one's guests," TIM answered.

"Yes, one must. So, what can you tell me about our new Tomorrow People?" he asked, settling onto the couch. A cup of tea and a plate of cookies materialized on the table in front of him, and he smiled. "I didn't mean that as a reminder, TIM."

"I didn't take it as one. I merely thought you might enjoy a snack while we talk."

Picking up a cookie, John bit into it and his smile broadened. "Thank you, TIM."

"You're welcome. Now, as to our new Tomorrow People. Adam is clearly the leader. Like you, he was the first. As each new Tomorrow Person breaks out, the ship draws them to itself, to avoid any losses in hyperspace."

"There've been no losses so far? Not one?"

"Not as far as I am aware. There is, of course, the possibility of drowning, but Adam is careful to be present on the island whenever a new Tomorrow Person arrives. He's a strong swimmer, and has had little difficulty in bringing them to shore. The current group of breakouts has been mercifully free of fatalities."

John released the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. They'd lost so many Tomorrow People to the horrors of hyperspace. The thought still chilled him. He envied Adam the ship and its power. If he'd had that ... well, no use in becoming maudlin. The past was past.

"Any ideas on how I should approach him?"

"Well, it would probably be best simply to contact him directly. I don't imagine he'd be very surprised to find someone else who can jaunt."

"But someone so much older? I rather remember being a little arrogant about my youth when I was his age — an adult showing up with the same powers just might take quite a bit of wind out of his sails."

"Perhaps. But I do think that you should try, as soon as possible ..."

Something in TIM's voice set John's nerves on alert. "TIM? What is it?"

"Well ... this," the computer replied, and a large white envelope materialized next to John's cup of tea. It was addressed to him, sent from the United States, from a place John of which had never heard.

"What is this ... Georgetown Institute of Science?"

"A highly prestigious institution of learning outside of Washington, D.C. I took the liberty of reading the letter — I apologize, but I didn't know at the time how quickly you'd return — and it's an invitation to a paranormal conference. You've been asked to deliver a paper on psychic powers in the young."

"A paper?" He frowned at the envelope, but picked it up and pulled out the letter. Reading it quickly, he looked up at TIM. "How did they know about me? Professor Cawston —"

"Died a few years ago, I'm sorry to say. He never divulged your secret. Neither have any of your other Sap friends. Speaking of which, Chris will most likely want to see you while you're here — he was asking after you not too long ago."

"I'd like that. So how — wait, what does this have to do with Adam and the others?"

"Adam received an invitation as well. Although he doesn't know about me, I do listen in on conversations at the ship. He's been asked to give a paper on coping with the onset of psychic powers at puberty."

"TIM —"

"I've done some research on GI — there is nothing to indicate any sort of plot involved here. But I do think that the conference bears looking into, John. Certainly if Adam has been invited, they have knowledge that might be useful."

"Or dangerous. Or ... do you suppose ... another sensitive? Someone we never found?"

"It's a possibility, John. One I think you should explore."

"Oh, I will, TIM. Count on it!"



F O R E V E R
KNIGHT

Forget Not

by Maddog

The night was clear and cold. It was such a clean, sparkling evening that Toronto appeared as it did on postcards, a conglomeration of bright lights on the edge of a dark lake. Detective Don Schanke blew on his numb left fingers and then stuffed them back in his brown suit pants. When he'd left the station, some eight hours ago, it had been warm enough to go out without an overcoat. Now he was freezing. Turning up the slightly worn collar of his blue blazer, he glared at his partner. Where Schanke's hair was dark and thinning, Knight's was thick and blond. Nicholas Knight appeared to be several years younger and pounds lighter than his partner. In contrast to Schanke's cheap suit, he was dressed in pleated black pants, a white, high-collared shirt and black leather jacket. It was the leather jacket that caught Schanke's attention. It was lined and looked wonderfully warm. He wondered if he could borrow it since his partner had left it unzipped, apparently oblivious to the cold.

"So what have we got?" Knight asked, startling his friend out of his reverie.

"A matchbook." Handing the small clue over, Schanke gratefully stuffed his other hand in his pocket.

"Ah," Nick turned the book around to read the embossed writing; McDonough's Motor Lodge. "Shall we go check it out?"

"Sure, just turn the heat on high, okay?"

"Why, you cold?" Nick grinned for a second at the dirty look that was shot him. He and Schanke had spent the last three hours tracking down a murder suspect. An informant had given Schanke a tip that had eventually led them to an abandoned car where the suspect's wallet had been found. Besides the matchbook, there were no other clues to the alleged killer's whereabouts. The pair of detectives got into Nick's '62 Cadillac and turned out of the parking lot.

Schanke stretched his hands out gratefully to the heating vent. "Man, I sure could go for a warm cup of coffee."

"Do you want to stop?"

"Nah, I'd rather check out this lead and call it a night."

"You don't think that Summers will be there?" Nick inquired. Scott Summers was the name of the alleged perpetrator they were tracking down. He had done time once for manslaughter and was a suspect in several unsolved murders in Toronto. It was an unfortunate case of too much suspicion and not enough hard evidence. Summers had been spotted near a bar where the owner had been killed while closing up for the night. A gun had been found not far from the scene; ballistics was checking to see if it was the weapon that had killed the man.

"Probably long gone, partner."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Gut instinct. When you've been a detective as long as I have, you get a gut feeling about these things."

"Well, you've certainly got a gut," Nick chided his friend.

"Hah, hah, very funny. If you're such a comedian, Knight, why don't you go to Vegas? Hey, there's the motel, and isn't it a fine looking establishment." Schanke pointed to a set of run down buildings that were lit by a red neon sign with letters missing.

Nick pulled the Caddy into a dark spot not far from the dilapidated sign that said "Lobby."

The pair entered the room and were instantly assaulted by a highly unpleasant odor. Gagging slightly, Schanke held back a step and let his partner take the lead. Nick flipped out his Toronto police badge and introduced them. "I need to know if this man," he held out Summers' picture, "is registered at this hotel."

"Gotta warrant?" snapped the manager, a fortyish blonde wearing too much pancake makeup.

"We're just trying to locate him, ma'am," Nick replied pleasantly.

"Why?" retorted the manager, not willing to give an inch.

While Nick argued with the motel's manager, an uncooperative blonde if he'd ever seen one, Schanke stepped back outside. The woman was obviously in need of a bath. And those pink stretch pants! Hadn't they been outlawed years ago? Taking a deep breath of the cold night air, he spotted a little girl, kicking a soccer ball by a red Ford Escort. She looked to be about his daughter Jenny's age. Schanke smiled slightly. He liked children and this one should be told that playing in between cars in a parking lot was simply not safe. He ambled over to the girl.

"Hey sweetheart, what's your name?" Schanke knelt down so that he was closer to the little girl's height. The girl took a few steps away from the car toward him.

"Marjie," she responded, smiling at him. "What's yours?"

"My name's Detective Schanke."

"Schanke?" Marjie wrinkled her nose. "That's a weird name."

"Weird? I'll have you know that Schanke is a great name!" he protested, trying to fix a look of deep hurt on his face.

"Yeah, well, it sounds weird to me," the girl informed him gravely, bouncing the soccer ball off her knee.

"Hey, you're pretty good with that. You play on a team?"

"Yeah, they've got teams that play over in the park. I," she stated proudly, "am first string."

"That's great. But you know, sweetheart, it's not safe to play in between these cars. Somebody could pull out and not see you. You don't want to get hit, do you?"

"No, guess not. But where can I practice? There's a game tomorrow."

"Hmm, let me look." Schanke stood up and looked around the parking lot for a safer place for the child to play. There was an area of the lot that was partially blocked off with concrete barriers, probably put there to prevent people from parking in front of the fire hydrant. He turned back to Marjie, his outstretched arm pointing. "That looks better to ..."

He never got a chance to finish his sentence. The Escort exploded, the red hot blast catching Marjie and Schanke, throwing them both effortlessly back toward the motel's lobby.



chanke," Nick yelled as soon as he heard the first rumblings of the detonation. Running out into the parking lot, he was temporarily blinded by the fire. His vampire-enhanced vision quickly adjusted and he ran to his friend, who was lying unmoving on his back on the concrete. "Call an ambulance!" he yelled out to the motel manager, who had followed him out. The woman nodded and ducked back inside. Kneeling down by his partner, he was horrified to see that Schanke was totally covered in blood. Reaching out, he fumbled for a pulse and was relieved to find a strong one. Glancing around he sighted another body, this one much smaller and just as unmoving. Leaving his friend's side, he moved closer to it to get a better look, then recoiled. The huge pool of fresh blood surrounding the small body was stirring up his unnatural appetite. There was no use trying to find the child's pulse. There wasn't enough of her left to have one.

Cursing inwardly, he went back to his partner, who was starting to stir. "Schanke, don't move," Nick cautioned, putting a hand lightly on the injured man's chest.

"Have ta ..." Schanke mumbled through swelling lips, increasing his efforts to sit up.

"You don't have to do anything but lay there and wait for the ambulance. Now stay still."

"The kid, gotta, you gotta help the kid."

Knight heard a faint, approaching ambulance siren. "All right, Schank. I'll go and check, but you," he ordered, "have got to stay quiet."

"Fine, jus' go."

Nick removed his hand from Schanke's bloodied chest. He noticed the blood had seeped underneath his fingernails as he stood up and walked over to the wreckage. Taking a deep breath, he removed his jacket and gently placed it over the little girl's body. It was the only thing he could think of to do to help.

Nick shifted uncomfortably in the hard plastic chair and looked at his watch. It was less than two hours until sunrise. There had been no word on Schanke's condition in over an hour. He was in emergency surgery to remove a sliver of metal that had lodged itself uncomfortably near his left eye. Luckily, for his partner anyway, the girl had taken the brunt of the blast. The detective's injuries were minor and caused by flying debris. Marjie Winters had been dead at the scene, killed instantly by the explosion.

"Nick?" a woman's voice broke his reverie. "How is he?"

Knight stood up and enveloped Natalie Lambert in a protective hug, her head, with its curly reddish-brown hair, buried against his chest. "He's going to be just fine, Nat."

"I got here as soon as I could. I was in the middle of an autopsy when Stonetree called," Natalie explained. She was a medical examiner with the Toronto coroner's office. "Has his doctor been here yet?"

"Not for a while, nobody has said anything for the last hour. Has Stonetree managed to reach Myra yet?"

"Yeah, he managed to reach her at her sister's," Dr. Lambert replied. Myra was Schanke's wife. "Captain Stonetree said she was taking it pretty well. She'll be here in a few hours."

Nick nodded in response and then returned to the chair, hunching slightly forward. "It's a miracle, you know."

As if sensing her friend's distress, Natalie sat in the chair beside him and put her arm around his shoulder. Nick continued talking, "If he had been any closer to that car he would have been killed along with that little girl."

"Not his day to die, I guess."

"No, not today," Nick responded, his frown deepening as he thought about the short span of time that was allotted to mortals.

"Do you think the bomb has something to do with the case you were on?" Nat prompted, changing the subject to more neutral ground, and giving Knight's shoulder a squeeze before removing her arm.

"It could be. We won't know for sure until we find out if Summers was actually at the motel or not."

"Detective Knight?" a crisp woman's voice called out down the corridor. It was Schanke's surgeon, Dr. Nathan.

"Yes, Doctor."

Walking over to the seated couple, Dr. Nathan proceeded to explain that the detective was resting peacefully and that everything was fine. They would have to watch the wound closely for infection, but it seemed fairly certain that Schanke would not have his sight impaired permanently.

"Can we see him?" Natalie asked.

"Only for a moment," the doctor cautioned, "He's still groggy from the anesthesia and needs his rest."

Nick and Nat walked down the quiet halls of the hospital to the room where their friend had been moved to. Schanke was dozing in the hospital bed, eyes bandaged, with a face nearly as white as the sheets upon which he lay.

"Schanke?" Nick called out softly as he approached the bed.

"Tha' you, Knight?" came the slurred reply.

"Yeah, it's me, partner. How you doing?"

"kay, I guess. Feel really out of it."

"Hi, Schanke," greeted Natalie as she took a hold of Don's hand. "You're doing just fine."

"How'd you know, Lambert? Everybody you work on is already dead," Schanke managed to mumble out.

"Well, if you can insult Nat, you can't be in that bad shape." Nick snorted, relief warming his body. "Myra will be here in a few hours. Until then, you keep out of trouble, you hear?" He laid a hand on his friend's shoulder briefly as Natalie said goodbye for both of them, promising that they'd be by tomorrow for a visit.

"All right," Schanke acknowledged as he drifted off back to sleep.

Hey Knight, how's that partner of yours doing?" Captain Stonetree's gravelly voice called out across the room. He was a large man, with a friendly, rubbery sort of face; friendly, at least, when he wasn't bellowing.

"He's doing better, Captain. Myra says he was flirting with the nurses when she came in. That's always a good sign."

"It'd be a better sign if he was trying to suck a souvlaki through his IV," Stonetree responded, facial expression never varying for a moment. "But that's good news. I'll try to visit him tomorrow, been trying to contain this mess."

"I'll get right on the lead we had for Summers," Knight assured him.

"No, you won't."

"I still think the bombing had something to do with Summers. I know it's just a hunch, but ..."

"It's a good hunch, that's not the problem," Stonetree answered. "I'm taking you off the case."

"I know Schanke won't be back for a while but I think I can handle the case alone."

"Didn't say you couldn't, but I want Billy and Jenny to handle it. Xavier and Munroe have experience with bombers."

"Maybe I haven't had much experience, but this case means a lot to me," declared Nick, a determined look starting to form on his face.

"I know and I understand, believe me. But part of the reason I'm taking you off this case is because you're emotionally involved with it."

"And the other reason?"

"Billy and Jenny are already working on another bombing that fits the same M.O. Makes sense to give them this one, too."

"All right," Nick nodded, keeping his voice calm, "I can see your point, but what if the bombing isn't related to the Summer's case? Someone needs to find him."

"Thought you just said you thought the bombing was related to the Summers' case?" Stonetree retorted.

"I said it was a hunch. What if I'm wrong? There are still some leads to follow up."

"Thought all you had was a matchbook?"

"Well, yes, but ..." Nick trailed off. Stonetree was right, the Summers' case dead-ended at the motel. The only potential source of new information was the bombing, and that only if it was related.

"But nothing. Look, Nick, I've had a partner hurt, too. Would've done anything to find the people responsible."

"Then let me follow up on the bombing."

"Let me finish, being emotionally involved in the case isn't going to help. Let Xavier and Munroe handle it, they're already living and breathing bombings."

"I don't like it," Nick stated flatly.

"Never said you had to. There's lots of other work for you to do," Stonetree said and turned to lumber back to his office.

Nick sat at his desk, unhappy at the turn of events. Oh, he understood the Captain's point. But he still didn't like it.

He was staring at a red brick wall. He wasn't sure how long he'd been there but it seemed like quite a long time. A noise penetrated through to him. It was the sound of a ball being bounced on concrete. A loud ping accompanied each bounce. Turning from the wall he started toward the sound. It grew louder and louder as he got closer to its source. The bouncing sound was becoming less and less a ping, and more and more a bang. He found the source of the noise. A little girl was

bouncing a white ball, only she wasn't bouncing it on concrete. She was bouncing it on top of some sort of liquid. The girl smiled at him, showing gaps in a grin where her teeth hadn't come in yet. She began bouncing the ball even harder so that it jumped up higher and higher. He smiled and walked toward her. Then he noticed that his feet were getting wet. Frowning he looked at them and reached down with his fingertips to touch them. The liquid was warm and he brought it to his face for a better look. Then he noticed that his hands were covered in blood. Stumbling backward, he started to fall and then ...

"Don, Don, wake up!" Myra shook her husband. He had been mumbling and thrashing about in his sleep. She was afraid he was going to tear off the bandage that was still over his left eye. "You okay?" she asked as he sat up, trembling violently.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine," he reassured her. "Those painkillers just give me some weird dreams, that's all."

"Maybe you should call the doctor and get the prescription changed."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll do that tomorrow. Sorry I woke you."

"That's okay," she replied, laying back down, not fully going back to sleep until her husband's breathing had settled into the deep, slow rhythm of sleep.

"Hey, partner," Schanke declared as he plopped down at his desk. It was heaped over with accumulated mail and files.

"Hey, Schanke, welcome back," Nick grinned. It had been nearly three weeks since Schanke had been injured. This was the first time he had been back at the station, though Nick had visited him several times.

"Good to be back, one more day filled with watching television and my brain would have turned to mush."

"How could you have told the difference?" Knight chided. He held out a box, tied with a bright red ribbon.

"A gift, for *moi*?"

"Yes, thought you might like something special for your first day back."

"Thank you," the detective ripped the ribbon off the box and gazed happily at its contents. "A dozen jelly doughnuts!"

"And none of those apple-filled ones that you don't like."

"Perfect," came the reply, mumbled through a raspberry doughnut that was already gushing jelly.

"Glad you like them. Don't eat them all at once."

"You have to eat them quickly. They get stale fast," Schanke replied, picking up another doughnut, the first one already a fading memory.

"Good to see your injuries haven't affected your appetite," Nick said as he took a good look at his friend. Schanke was thinner and his eyes still had dark circles around them. Residual bruising? he wondered. "So what do you want to catch up on today?"

"Well, I want to catch up on the Summers' case, of course, but I've got an appointment with the Department's shrink."

"Thought you were cleared to return to duty?"

"I am, but she wanted one more visit with me. Bunch of bull hockey, I'm fine. Vision's back to normal, feeling fine, the old Schanke machine is 100%."

"It's probably just a formality, Schank."

"Yeah, but it's a pain. We'll catch up tomorrow," picking up his box of doughnuts, the dark-haired man crammed another one into his mouth. Waving to his partner he went off to keep his appointment.

"Hey, Don!" a voice called out to him urgently. "Look out, it's coming your way!"

Glancing around frantically around the field, Schanke spotted the ball a long way off, near the other team's goal. He started running in the direction of the goal as fast as he could. He

looked down at his feet; they seemed to barely touch the ground. The other team's members seemed to be moving at half-speed as he charged at the ball. One of his teammates passed it to him and he easily managed to start it goalward. The goalie was short, barely taking up any of the expanse of the goal. He shot the ball hard to the lefthand side. The goalie reacted in slow motion as the ball came forward. The ball slowed down as well. Hurling sideways, the goalie bodily stopped the ball. The ball hit the defender's chest and exploded. The force of the blast knocked Schanke off his feet and he struggled to get up as the very ground seemed to pitch like a boat. Managing to finally get up, he lurched toward the goal. The explosion had left the ball untouched, only the goalie was laying in the reddened grass, eyes staring vacantly at him. Then the goalie started to move ...

"Don, honey, honey," Myra shook her husband. He was having another bad dream. "Don, wake up. Wake up, it's time for you to get to work."

"Wha?" Schanke sat up with a start and glanced anxiously around. It was only his bedroom that greeted his eyes. "Oh, uh, I'm up, I'm up," he assured his wife.

"You were having another bad dream, weren't you?" she accused.

"No, no I wasn't. Just really tired, that's all. You scared me when you woke me up."

"You were moaning long before I even got into the room."

"Well, maybe that's because I was dreaming of you, my little love muffin," he joked, trying to throw his wife off his case.

Myra would not be distracted. "You haven't been sleeping well for weeks. I want you to go see somebody, maybe the police psychologist could help."

"No," came her husband's firm reply. "No way. I'm fine Myra. Really, I just need some rest, that's all." Climbing out of bed the detective headed to the shower to get dressed. "Those shrinks don't help anybody anyway, they just cause people to start wondering if they've lost their nerve."

"I don't believe Nick would think that, Don. Why don't you ..."

"I said *no*," snapped Schanke, slamming the door of the bathroom.

Myra stared at the door for a moment and decided not to pursue an argument. She knew from long experience it wouldn't do any good right now. As soon as she heard the water of the shower turn on, she went over to the phone and started dialing. "Hello, Nick? It's Myra. Have you got a minute?"

Schanke bit into the grape jelly doughnut and cursed through a mouthful of it when some of the jelly oozed out of it onto the folder he was reading. "Are you telling me this is how far you got in the Summers' case while I was out?"

"I told you, Stonetree put somebody else on it right after you got hurt. He thought that I would be too emotionally involved. How'd you get the case file anyway?" Nick replied as he made a sharp left, swerving the car slightly to avoid a pothole.

"Picked it up off that mess Billy calls a desk. He and Jenny are working a stakeout tonight. They won't be needing it."

Deciding not to mention that it was definitely not standard procedure to take another detective's case file from the precinct, Nick thought about how to broach the subject that had been on his mind all evening. His partner had been edgy since he had returned from sick leave, but he had put that down to the injury and the manner in which it had happened. Myra was concerned, though. Don hadn't been sleeping well, had had bad dreams for weeks, and refused to go see anybody about the problem. The big problem was, how to broach the subject without Schanke getting ticked off at him? Glancing at the address given to them by an informant, Knight noticed that they were nearly at their intended destination. "Hey, Schank, we're just about there. Let's concentrate on the case we're supposed to be working on, okay?"

"Okay, but do you really think that this punk's gonna know anything about the Zinichka murders?"

Nick shrugged, the leather of his new jacket squeaking slightly. "He might. It's worth a shot. None of the other leads have panned out at all."

"Go figure, partner. Two members of the same family gunned down, miles apart, at nearly the exact same time. No witnesses, no apparent motives, no clues, *nada*. There's gotta be something, somewhere."

"You still think it was drug-related?"

Schanke brushed at the drying sugar ring around his mouth before answering, "Nah, the pieces just don't fit. Maybe you had the right idea, and it's some kind of domestic thing within the family. They sure seemed like an excitable bunch when we interviewed them."

"Yeah, I'd never had baklava thrown at me before," said Nick as he unconsciously rubbed at the still-sticky spot on his pants.

"All in the line of duty, pal,"

Happy to hear his partner making wisecracks, Nick relaxed at the wheel. He'd been tense all evening because his partner had been jumpy and edgy. The dark-haired detective had been at times withdrawn, at other times irritable. The fact that the police were no closer to finding who had planted the car bomb that had killed the little girl and injured Schanke, not to mention not finding Summers, had only made it worse. Maybe, he thought to himself, the Zinichka case would take Schank's mind off his troubles.

"There's the factory," Schanke called out, pointing toward a large, gray, dilapidated building. Nick pulled the Caddy into a gravel driveway and stopped close to the building. It took a second for Schanke to notice what Nick's vampire enhanced eyes had spotted instantly, a tall, gangly figure hiding near some barrels.

"And there's our informant," Nick commented as he stopped the car. The two detectives exited the car and walked carefully toward the informant. His appearance suggested he was in his late thirties but he could have been any age; drugs and alcohol had made him a shaking shell of a man. They put a few barrels between the street and themselves.

"You got the money?" the figure asked.

"Sure, we got your money. You got the info?" Schanke retorted.

"Yeah, yeah, sure."

"Let's have it then," prompted Nick, trying to stay upwind.

"Let's see it first," the informant said firmly, apparently afraid of getting burned and not getting his fix for the night. He stared greedily as the leather-jacketed detective produced an envelope with several large bills in it, fanning the bills to let the man see that the amount agreed upon was there. "Okay. Well, I heard you guys were looking for a murderer."

"Aren't we always?" Schanke responded, shaking his head a little. The addict didn't seem to get the joke and simply stared blankly at him. "Go on."

"Anyway, there was this guy, you know, he was at this party I was at. Well, it wasn't really a party, more like a, uh, like a get-together. Anyway, this guy was talking about this job he'd done. Job had paid really well. Sick dude though, he was happy that he'd blown this guy away, you know. Bad karma, all around, you know?"

"What'd he look like, this dude?" inquired Nick.

"Tall guy, muscular, thin, wore these really weird red sunglasses, even inside. Had a real attitude, you know."

"Where'd he say this really good job took place?" Schanke probed.

"Bar, bar off of Charles Street, forget the name, um ..."

Neither of the Zinichkas had been killed anywhere near Charles Street, so the junkie's information was going to be useless, Nick thought, but then he remembered another case. "Was it the Vic?"

"Yeah, that's right, the Vic! Do I get my money now?"

"You said this guy wore red sunglasses right?" Schanke prompted.

"Right, weird red sunglasses, couldn't figure out how he saw anything. Nasty dude."

"Was his name Summers?" Schanke questioned.

"Uh, not sure, heard somebody call him Scott. Can I get my money now?"

"Sure, just one more question. Do you know where this guy hangs out?" Nick asked.

"Nah, not for sure anyway, the people he was with though, they hang out near the docks."

"Here you go," Nick handed over the envelope. "And if you hear anything about or see that guy again you give us a call and there'll be another envelope."

"That works," the informant nodded sagely as he stumbled off into the dark, further back into the warehouse.

The two Toronto detectives headed back to Nick's car. They didn't start discussing what they'd heard until they had pulled out into the road.

"You know, we're not on the case, Schanke," offered the leather-jacketed vampire.

"We're not on the case, Schanke," parroted his partner, in a mocking sing-song voice. "Look, Knight, tracking down Summers means a lot to me."

"I know, partner. But we really should turn the stuff over to Billy and Jenny, it's their case, let them handle it."

"They couldn't handle a difficult case if it was gift-wrapped for 'em."

"You know that's not true, Schanke," Nick replied soothingly. "They're both good detectives and I'm sure ..."

Whatever Nick was going to say got cut short by the insistent blare of their radio. Schanke answered the call and was informed that there had been a suspected homicide west of them. Acknowledging the call, the two detectives headed for the crime scene, their dispute over the information about the Summers' case temporarily forgotten. The location the dispatcher had given them was only a few blocks away from where they had met the informant. It was a run-down house, junk heaped around the yard. There were two patrol cars out in front of the house, lights flashing against the peeling paint. Parking the car, the two men got out and headed over toward the officers.

"Hey, Neddie," Schanke called out to one, a red-headed woman who was deep in conversation with another policeman.

"Hey there, Schanke, good to have you back."

"Thanks, what's up?"

"Some neighbors heard some screaming about an hour ago. Guess it got bad enough that they decided it was worth calling us."

"That's a surprise, usually it's no hear, no see, no get involved."

"Yeah, well, we got the call and came right over," Neddie motioned the two detectives to follow her over to the area roped off by yellow "Do Not Cross" tape. There was a photographer carefully taking photos of the area. "Too late though, she was already dead."

"What's the apparent cause?" Knight and Schanke took a step closer to the body. It was a young girl, about thirteen or fourteen by the looks of her. She was dressed in faded blue jeans and a Toronto Blue Jays baseball shirt. The shirt, gray and blue originally, was soaked with blood.

"Multiple stab wounds, looks like she bled to death."

"Schanke?" Nick was about to ask his partner a question when he noticed that Schanke had left the immediate area. Nick began asking questions of the other officers, getting all the information needed to begin the investigation. The coroner motioned Knight over and reported his findings, then the ambulance arrived to take the girl to the Coroner's office. Satisfied that they had gotten enough photos and other physical evidence, he let her be taken away. Then he began to look for his missing partner. He found him sitting on the house's neglected back step. "Schanke," he called out gently.

"Yeah?"

"You okay?" Nick stood in front of his friend.

"Yeah, fine, it was just all that blood."

"I understand. They've taken her away. We'll get who did this."

"What's it matter? What difference will it make to her?"

"None, but maybe we can stop the person who did this from doing it again."

"Yeah, right. We get the person who did this, and then maybe he'll be out in a few years or months, but even that doesn't matter. Somebody else'll come along and kill the next kid," Schanke rubbed his eyes, his voice strained.

"Maybe. Look Schanke, you know how this is. We can't stop every murder from occurring. We can just do the best we can," consoled Nick.

"Yeah, and what if our best doesn't amount to shit? Another kid dead. Another little girl laying in a pool of her own blood."

"Schanke ..."

"What the hell difference do we make, anyway?" the detective glared at his partner, eyes red with tears. "All that blood everywhere!"

Nick studied his friend for a moment. This went far deeper than the terrible sight of the dead girl. Murder was horrible; it was even more loathsome when a child was involved. But this was the work Schanke had chosen for himself. He had exposed himself to horrors every night in order to make the city a little bit safer. This outburst wasn't coming from the scene that he had just left. Nick was sure that it was coming from the aftermath of the explosion. Myra had told him that Schanke wasn't sleeping well, had nightmares. But what could he say to comfort his friend? All the normal words would sound like hollow platitudes. "I know," he finally said, voice little more than a whisper. "I know." He put his hand on Schanke's shoulder as he sat down with him on the back steps.

"I keep seeing it. All that blood. Like a tidal wave coming over me. I close my eyes and I just keep seeing it. Shit, one minute it's some little kid bouncing a ball and the next it's just a bleeding hunk of meat with no life left in it. I just keep seeing it." The tears were rolling down Schanke's face, his eyes staring straight ahead into the night. He took a deep trembling breath.

There were no words that Nick could think of to say. He knew that Schanke would refuse to go to a psychiatrist unless directly ordered and even

then, would he talk about his feelings to a stranger? He'd be fine once he got past the memory of the girl's death. Schanke's mind had fixated on the scene, was replaying it over and over again, every time dragging his mind back through the hell of it, every time the emotions getting that much stronger. The memory seeped into each sleeping and waking thought. If he could just get past it. Deciding, Nick gathered his strength and spoke to his partner. "Schanke, look at me." The only reply was a shake of his friend's head. "Schanke, look at me, now." Knight's voice commanded, becoming deeper, more compelling.

The other man looked over at him. If he noticed that Nick's eyes were now glowing red he didn't give any sign. He simply stared blankly.

"Forget it, Schanke. Forget all about the explosion and all about the blood," Nick ordered.

"Forget it," Schanke mumbled in reply.

"That's right, forget it," Nick's eyes dimmed and his voice regained its normal tone, "Forget it, Schanke, it gets to everybody sometimes."

"Yeah," Schanke stood up and dusted off the back of his pants. "Thanks, Knight."

"For what?" Nick forced a grin at his friend.

"You know, for not making fun of me getting a bit queasy at the sight of blood."

"Like I said, happens to everybody. Let's go." The two detectives left the backyard of the house and headed for Knight's car.



h good, you remembered to get diet soda this time," Dr. Natalie Lambert called out, her head buried deep in Nick's refrigerator. She was rooting around for something to eat. Lately Nick had been remembering to keep some edibles on hand.

"I don't see why you want to drink diet soda, Nat. You're not fat."

"And I'd rather not get that way." The coroner picked out a box of frozen Twinkies from the freezer and brought them over to the couch along with her soda.

Knight looked at the combination she was about to consume. "Diet soda and Twinkies?"

"They're the low fat kind," she defended as she sat down on the couch. Opening one of the little plastic bags the Twinkies came in, she bit the end off one. Very carefully, she then proceeded to nibble away only at the golden sponge cake, carefully avoiding the creamy filling that was still frozen hard. Soon she was left only with the tube of filling in her hand, that she stuffed in her mouth, clearly enjoying the cold, sweet taste of it.

Nick had watched the proceeding culinary event with a mixture of fascination and horror. Fascination because, it was very interesting to watch Natalie dissect her food and horror because he had once read what Twinkies were made of. Natalie had been trying to encourage him to eat for months. So far, the success had been limited, but he had made the effort to at least purchase and examine food. After eight hundred years of a strictly blood diet, he had been intrigued by modern food. Intrigued and wondering if he shouldn't get a degree in chemistry so that he could understand what the ingredients were. Finally, his friend noticed his intense stare.

"What?" she asked, hands already reaching for another Twinkie.

"Nothing," he replied, deciding that discretion was called for. After all, he had never had a Twinkie, maybe they were quite good. Though Schanke claimed that anything with reduced fat in the title was a sick joke made up by some religious group that thought self-denial was good for the soul. Fat, he claimed, made things taste good. "What movie did you bring over?"

"*Paint Your Wagon*."

"A Western?"

"A singing Western. It's got Clint Eastwood in it," Nat informed him through a mouth full of cake. She had managed to whittle the second Twinkie down to creamy filling.

"Sounds interesting," Nick popped the tape into the machine and started it. Natalie had obviously seen it many times before and was singing along to many of the songs as they watched the movie. The phone rang.

"Leave it," Natalie urged him, "a good part's coming up."

"Okay," Nick agreed, wondering if it was actually Eastwood singing or not. The answering machine picked up and Schanke's loud voice intruded into the room.

"Hey, Knight? Enjoying your night off, or are you doing that angsty artist thing again? Anyway, wanted to tell you that I think I might have a lead on the Zinichka case. Somebody in the family has something they might be trying to hide," Schanke's voice was jubilant. "We can follow up on it tomorrow. Have fun! Hasta la bye-bye."

"He sounds good," Natalie commented after the message had ended.

"Yeah, he's back to his old self."

"The way he looked right after he came back from sick leave, I was worried he might have some problems. It was a traumatic event."

"Yeah, well, he did have some problems at first, but that's all behind him," Nick informed her off-handedly.

"Did he finally agree to go see a psychiatrist?"

"No, you know how he feels about that."

"What, then?"

"He just forgot about the incident, put it behind him," the detective kept looking at the TV screen.

"Uh-huh, and just how exactly did he manage to do that?" Natalie persisted, as though something struck her as wrong. "Schanke was very upset by the bombing. He wouldn't just have forgotten about it, not without help. You hypnotized him, didn't you?"

"Well, yeah," Nick confessed, "He got really upset one night. Wasn't doing himself any good replaying it over and over in his mind. So I just told him to forget about it."

"I don't think that was a good idea, Nick."

"Why not? He seems fine now."

"Yeah, but you can't just erase something like that from somebody's mind. There's bound to be repercussions."

Shaking his head in disagreement, "No, I don't think so. He just had to put the memory out of his thoughts. He's fine now."

"Okay, we'll see," Natalie acquiesced. She looked at him as though she didn't like it, but there was no reason to argue if it seemed to be working. She grabbed another Twinkie and went back to watching the movie.

He opened the door. It seemed like the thing to do. There was nothing else in the room at all, so he opened the door. Then he was outside. It was nighttime and he was outside. He was standing in a parking lot. There wasn't any noise and the dark seemed too bright to be called night. He looked at the building in front of which he was standing. The building was important somehow, he knew that. He started walking toward it. He was nearly to the building, a motel it seemed to be. When the noise hit him, and the light, and then there was blood pouring out of the motel. Coming at him nearly horizontally, gushing out from every window in the place. Hot, red liquid forcing him back, causing him to slip as he tried to get away. He kept slipping and he was afraid of falling. If he fell, all the blood would keep him down, drowning him, he knew it would. He had to keep on his feet, just a few more yards and he'd be all right. Just a few more yards and then he felt his right foot skid and he stumbled backward. Arms flailing, he tried to stop himself. Had to get his balance back, had to.

"And tonight there's a seventy percent chance of severe thunderstorms," a loud, cheerful voice blared at him. Schanke sat up and looked at the radio next to his bed dumbly. The radio had turned on, signalling it was time for him to get up. The dream already fading from his mind he wondered vaguely what had caused such a nightmare. "Too many sardines and onions," he mumbled to himself aloud as he got out of bed.

About time you got here, Knight," Schanke called out to his partner as Nick walked into the precinct. He started putting on his coat. "Come on, come on, let's move it."

"What's the rush? Your lead on the Zinichka case that hot?" Nick questioned as he turned to leave the precinct. Schanke was hurrying toward the Cadillac.

"Well, let's just say that nobody likes a cold pierogi."

"Huh?" was Knight's only response as he hopped into his car and pulled away from the station. "Where to?"

"Over to Bay street. We gotta talk to a man about pierogies. Then we have to go over to the Vic."

"What's at the Vic?"

"Following up the lead that we got the other night on Summers."

Nick shook his head in warning, "Schanke, it's not our case."

"Yeah, I know. But hey, I figure that it might be related to the Zinichka case."

"How?"

"Mmm, synchronicity?"

"Do you know what that word means?"

"Sure I do, what do you think it means?"

Shaking his head in disbelief, Nick gave in, "Okay, fine, we'll go check out the Vic for any information on Summers. Who knows, maybe it is related." They drove in silence for the next fifteen minutes. Glancing over at his partner, Nick found him gazing thoughtfully out the window, chewing on his lower lip. "What number?" he finally asked.

"Huh?"

"What's the address?"

"Number 4302, uh," Schanke answered, realizing that they were on Bay Street. "Right over there," he pointed to a brick building with a large sign out in front that announced it as "Zinichka's Pierogi Factory and Restaurant."

"You were serious about seeing somebody about pierogies, weren't you?"

"Yeah, sure. Turns out that the two people who were killed owned quite a bit of this place. It was a family venture but the mother divided it among her kids a few years back when she decided to go to Florida and enjoy the sun."

"I think I'm beginning to get the picture."

"Always said you were a quick study, Knight. Anyway, some of the kids sold their shares so it came down to four of them owning the place. Now there's two of them."

"And let me guess, one of the two remaining ones is a little afraid for his safety."

"You got it," the two detectives parked the car and walked toward the front door of the restaurant. The "closed" sign was illuminated but there was still lights on inside, visible through a large plate-glass window. Nick knocked on the door.

"Are you the detectives?" a voice called out. They held up their badges, the door opened and a tall, olive-skinned man stood in front of them. "Come in, come in, let's get away from all that glass."

"You're Mr. Yuri Zinichka?"

"Yeah, that's me. Are you the guy I talked to yesterday?"

"I sure am, Detective Don Schanke," Schanke held out his hand, "and this is my partner Nick Knight."

"Thank you for coming."

"I'm sorry about your brother and sister, Mr. Zinichka," Schanke said sympathetically.

"Horrible, a horrible thing to happen to my family. Stefan and Anna were very dear to me. We'd always lived close to each other, you see and ..." his voice trailed off.

"You told us originally that you had no idea who killed your brother and sister, Mr. Zinichka," Nick prompted.

"Yes, you see I wasn't sure. Didn't want to believe it at first, but now, now I'm pretty sure it was my brother Joe that did it."

"That would be Joseph Zinichka?" Schanke questioned and the man nodded in agreement.

"Yes, my older brother. We'd been having our disagreements but who would have thought he'd resort to having them killed? Over pierogies?"

"Why do you think they were killed?"

"Health fillings," Yuri stated. At the looks of puzzlement on the detectives' faces, he explained, "Anna and Stefan wanted to expand the number of fillings we put in the pierogies. Low-fat cheeses, raisins, even some sort of bran mixture, that sort of stuff. Trying to get a larger market. The pierogi business is very competitive."

"I can imagine," Schanke responded.

"And Joe, well, Joe didn't want to tamper with Mama's recipes. Said it was sacrilegious or something."

"I thought your mother was alive?"

"She is."

"And what did she have to say about changing the recipes?"

Yuri shrugged his shoulders, "We asked her. She said 'Do what you want but remember I've lived eighty-five years eating lard and drinking garlic juice. You should tell your customers to drink the garlic juice if they want to live a long time.' So Anna and Stefan figured it'd be okay to try out the new fillings."

Nick had shuddered at the words "drinking garlic juice" but had recovered quickly, "Besides the fact that your brother was upset about the change, do you have any proof that he committed murder?"

"Well, he didn't kill them himself, you understand. He isn't too fond of blood so he hired these two guys to do it."

"What two guys?"

"The guys on this tape," Zinichka handed them a videotape. "It's from the surveillance camera. We're worried about getting robbed. You know how it is nowadays."

"So you've got your brother on tape hiring hit men?" Nick asked incredulously.

"Yeah," Yuri shrugged, "Joe, he's never been too bright."

The detectives spent the next fifteen minutes questioning Zinichka further, getting as much information from him as they could. Zinichka provided them with his sibling's likely whereabouts and names of the shadier characters his brother knew. Then they took the videotape and returned to the car.

"I cannot believe that!" Schanke exclaimed as he got into the car.

"What, that the guy let himself be videotaped hiring hit men or killing your siblings over pierogi filling?"

"Letting himself get videotaped. I mean, pierogi filling is a bit sacred after all." The two detectives laughed at the joke and Nick started the car and commenced toward the Vic. Both were happy that one investigation seemed to be going well.

It was a loud, seedy bar that had no coherent theme or decor to it unless you could count cheap beer as a theme. The odor of stale beer and vomit hit the two men even before they got the door to the Vic open. Glancing around, they didn't spot Summers, so they made their way carefully to the bar. The questions, responses, denials and conversation went like clockwork. No, no guy named Scott Summers came into the bar, no, never saw him before, oh, murder of a little kid, huh, nope, never saw him in here but I bet if he did come in again it'd be on Monday, a lot of people wearing strange red sunglasses seem to come in on Monday, you're scaring the customers, why don't you leave.

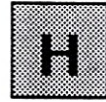
"You ever notice that cheap beer smells really bad?" Schanke asked his friend as they left the bar.

"It's not the spilled beer, its the digested beer that gets me. We'd better get back to the station and work on the investigation we're assigned to."

"Yeah, guess you're right. You gonna give the information on Summers to Billy and Jenny?"

"Yes, it's their case Schank, no matter how we feel about it."

Schanke looked at his partner for a moment and then nodded his agreement. Then they headed back to work.



He was laying on the ground, staring up at the sky which was the harsh, metallic gray of an approaching winter storm. It began to snow. The flakes landed on his face and melted. Annoyed, he stood up and began walking across the gray, snowy, landscape. He noticed that there was a pond nearby. Walking toward it, he saw a little girl skating on the surface, her fluid motions beckoning to him. Then he noticed that it wasn't ice the child was on but some sort of dark fluid. Moving closer, he walked out onto the liquid on which the child was standing. Only he wasn't able to stand on it and quickly started sinking. Struggling backward, he tried to get back to shore. But he wasn't able to. He felt himself drowning in the water that wasn't water. It was blood and it was covering him and he was sinking fast. The child noticed his distress and came over. She looked down at him as he slipped deeper into the blood and gave a slight frown as he disappeared under the surface. Opening his mouth to dry to get one last breath, he tasted something hot and salty and ...

"Noooo," For a moment, Schanke wasn't too sure who had said the word, "No," but since he was the only one in the room it must have been him. Myra had already left the house for some yard sales. "Man, that was a bad one," he commented to himself as he got out of bed and into the shower. It was Saturday, a day reserved for things around home and family. Looking into the mirror as he shaved, he was glad it wasn't a work day. His eyes were ringed by dark circles, his skin very pale beneath them. Maybe he shouldn't have tried to go back to work so soon after being injured, he thought. Yeah, that's it, he told himself, that's probably what the problem is.



And you think that she was dead before she was burned?" Nick spoke into the phone that was cradled between his chin and shoulder. Natalie was on the other end of the line, giving him the results of the autopsy she had just performed. "Well, that does agree with the confession. Yeah, yeah," he quickly wrote down the information she was giving him. "I'll expect the official report tomorrow then? Great. Yeah, we're still on for tonight. See you then, bye Nat." Putting the

phone down, he noticed that Schanke was coming out of the men's room and heading toward his desk. His partner looked like hell. The dark circles that had been under his eyes for weeks now stood out deep purplish black against pale skin. Though Schanke had never been what Nick would have classified as neat, his appearance was generally fairly tidy, but today his shirt looked slept in and had damp spots down the front of it. "Are you okay?"

"Hmm? Fine," Schanke responded off-handedly. Picking up a folder off his desk, he stared at it blankly for a few moments.

"You're not fine, Schank. Do you have the flu or something?"

"No, no, nothing like that. Just didn't get much sleep this weekend."

Assessing his friend's condition, Nick made a guess at its cause, "Are you still having bad dreams?"

"No," Schanke said, a little too forcefully. "I just didn't get a lot of sleep the past two days, that's all." Standing up he went over to the coffee machine and started pouring himself a cup. His hands were shaking, Nick noticed. Walking back over to his desk Schanke asked, "Was that the Grey autopsy you were talking about?"

"Yes, it was," Nick responded, allowing the subject to be changed. "What McCoy said was true, she was dead before he burned her. Thought he was cleansing her of evil or something."

"Or something! is right, another weirdo. When's the psychiatric evaluation due in?"

"Tomorrow. We'll get the official autopsy report then, too. Do you want to work on the Worthington case?" Not getting a response, Knight looked up from the papers he had been glancing through. His partner was staring into his coffee cup, swirling the brown contents around. "Schanke? Schank?"

"What?" Schanke started, the hand holding the coffee jerking involuntarily at being startled. The coffee went flying, all over the desk and his pants. "Damn it, Knight, don't scare me like that!" he said angrily, standing up and trying to wipe the coffee off himself.

"Having a drinking problem, Detective Schanke?" Captain Stonetree walked over to the pair. He was appraising the man with an impassive glare.

"No, Captain, just a little accident, that's all."

"You look like crap," Stonetree finally pronounced his evaluation of the subject.

"Why, thank you, and might I just say, you look quite nice today yourself," Schanke retorted.

"It's a new tie," the captain responded without a hint of a smile, "Are you sick?"

"No, as I was explaining to Detective Knight here, I just didn't get a lot of sleep this weekend."

"You still having nightmares from that bombing case?"

"What!" the darker-haired detective exclaimed, then he fixed his partner with a decidedly dirty look.

Nick held up his hands in appeasement, to say, no, I didn't tell him.

Reading the silent exchange between the two men, Stonetree continued, "No, Nick didn't tell me. The department psychiatrist mentioned that you were having them on her report. She didn't think it was serious at the time, but considering the way you look, now maybe she was wrong."

"Can't a guy have an off weekend without everybody thinking he's crazy!" Schanke angrily replied, throwing the file he was holding down on the desk and standing up from his chair.

"Sure he can. Are you sure that's all it was?" The captain's gaze never wavered from the detective's pale face.

"Yes, I'm sure, Captain."

"All right, then," Stonetree decided, "go home and get some sleep. But if you come in here again looking like the living dead I'm send you to talk to a professional, understand?"

"Understood," Schanke agreed, sitting down heavily in his chair.

Nick waited until the captain had left the area before saying anything to his partner. Maybe Stonetree should have pushed the issue more, he thought. Schanke did look like hell, but if he was so against the idea of talking to a psychiatrist, it probably wouldn't help. Then again, he added, maybe he wouldn't need help if I hadn't played around in his head in the first place. Maybe releasing the block would help?

"Well, have a nice night, partner," Schanke interrupted his line of thought.

"Yeah, I'll try and get some of the paper work you love doing out of the way. Look Schanke, if you want to talk about anything ..."

"I know you'll be glad to listen," his partner sighed loudly as he stood up, "That's just it, I don't have anything to talk about. I really don't remember the bombing at all. It's just that I'm having some problems sleeping, that's all."

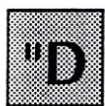
"No bad dreams?" Nick asked with raised eyebrows.

"All right, a few bad dreams but they don't make any sense. I don't know, I probably just need a good night's sleep and it'll all be fine again."

"Yeah, that's probably it," Knight replied, not believing it at all. "Good night, partner."

"Yeah, 'night."

"And Schanke," Nick called out, his friend turning around before he left the building, "Pleasant dreams." His partner didn't even bother making a wisecrack as he left the station.



rink this," Natalie ordered, holding out an evil-smelling concoction.

"What is it?" Nick asked, wrinkling his nose at the odor.

"Ancient Chinese herbs, native American roots and Diet Coke."

"Diet Coke?"

"Yeah, it's the only thing that would dissolve the herbs and roots. I got the recipe out of some of those books you lent me a while back. Drink it."

"Thought you were taking a strictly scientific approach?" the blond detective asked as he took a small sip of the beverage, his face wrinkled in disgust at the taste.

"Folk remedies often do have a scientific basis. Modern science hasn't investigated what every naturally-occurring compound does. Many of our current medicines were originally based on herbs. Finish it up."

Taking a deep breath, Nick guzzled down the last of the beverage. When the taste finally receded enough for him to talk, he asked, "What's it supposed to do?"

"Increase your tolerance for the sun. After you've taken it for a week we'll see how you hold up with more sunlight."

"You mean I have to drink that every day?"

"Twice a day, actually," Natalie informed him as she handed him a tall bottle of the stuff. "So how was work? McCoy tell you anything further?"

"No, he's being evaluated now. I just wonder if he's done something like this before."

Natalie made a face and then replied, "I hope not. It's going to take days to get that burned smell out of the morgue. Yuck."

"Remind you too much of the last dinner you cooked?"

She responded by chucking one of the pillows on the couch at him. "Fine, see if I ever invite *your* friend and his wife over for dinner again. Speaking of your friend, how's Schanke doing? He looked like something Sydney dragged in the last time I saw him."

"Actually, he's not doing so good."

"Oh? What seems to be the problem, or should I take a guess?" Natalie sat on the chair facing Nick. She watched as he squirmed slightly. It amused her sometimes to watch his physical reactions. For an eight-hundred-year-old vampire, he sometimes managed to act like a little boy caught doing something he shouldn't. It was charming; actually, she thought, she found him too damned charming at times.

"You were right," Nick finally responded, looking earnestly at her. "I shouldn't have made him forget the bombing. I don't know how but it's affecting his dreams and making him more upset."

Natalie nodded and leaned forward, chin in hand, elbow resting on knee, "So, now that you know what the problem is, what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. I suppose I should make him remember again, only then he'll be as bad off as he was before, or worse."

"Maybe, but this time he can work through it naturally," Natalie commented. Sensing his guilt she continued, "Nick, you did what you thought would help. So maybe this time it didn't work out, it doesn't mean that next time it will. Now, come on," she stood up and tugged at his arm. "I don't want to miss the music."

"Where are we going tonight?"

"There's a new all-night bookstore in town. Tonight they're having live Celtic music and storytelling. Should be fun." The medical examiner went over and put on her coat. "Besides, they're supposed to have really good pastry."

"What is it with bookstores all of a sudden serving food?" Nick wanted to know. "For years they wouldn't let you in the store if you had any food with you and all of a sudden they're selling it?"

"How better to attract customers than the offering of sugar," Natalie explained, smiling at him. "Come on, someday you'll understand," She held up her arm and Nick took it as they left the apartment.



It was dark outside, the moon full in the sky. Its reflected light was making the windows on the building glow. He was standing in front of a door, a glass door. Beside it was a sign that said "lobby" on it. Opening the door, he entered. The room was deserted, with old frayed magazines on the table, and a desk that contained only an open ledger. Walking over to the ledger, he tried to read its contents, but he couldn't make out the words. The names kept changing as he read them. Then a bell rang. At first he could not figure out where the noise was coming from, and then he realized

that an elevator was descending, about to open its doors. Walking over to the elevator, he waited for it to open. With one final ding of the bell, the door opened. For a moment he was confronted with a vertical sheet of liquid, a dark red liquid, then it started to pour out of the elevator. It happened ever so slowly, so slowly that he could see the top of the liquid start to fall, the bottom bulging out toward him, reaching for him. Backpedalling, he started to move away from the elevator doors as fast as he could. The liquid was faster though, it hit him in the chest and pushed at him, pushed him backward. Struggling, he fell, but one arm managed to reach the handle of the lobby door. Forcing himself to stay upright, he managed to get the door open and lever himself out all in one motion. Not bothering to close the door, he ran out into the parking lot and was standing in front of a door, a glass door.

Beside it was a sign that said "lobby." Opening the door, he entered. The room was deserted, with old frayed magazines on the table, and a desk that contained only an open ledger. Walking over to the ledger, he tried to read its contents, but he couldn't make out the words. The names kept changing as he read them. Then a bell rang. At first he could not figure out where the noise was coming from, and then he realized that an elevator was descending, about to open its doors. Fear gripped him, his heart beating loudly in his ears. He didn't want to see the elevator open, he knew that. He had to get away from it before it opened. He hurried over to the lobby door and tried to get out. But the door wouldn't open, no matter how hard he pushed on it. Then a bell rang. He turned around and watched as the elevator opened, it seemed like a giant mouth, disgorging its bloody contents toward him. Turning away from the sight, he redoubled his efforts to get the door open. Then the liquid hit him, warm and wet, and it pushed both him and the door forward into the night.

It was dark outside, the moon full in the sky. There was a hotel in front of him, a badly-lit neon sign proclaimed it to be "McDonough's Motel." Walking forward, he was standing in front of a door, a glass door. Beside it was a sign that said "lobby." Opening the door, he entered. The room was deserted, with old frayed magazines on the table, and a desk that contained only an open ledger. Walking over to the ledger, he tried to read its contents, but he couldn't make out the words. The names kept changing as he read them.

Then a bell rang. At first he could not figure out where the noise was coming from, and then he realized that an elevator was descending, about to open its doors. This time, he didn't wait, he ran toward the glass door. It wouldn't open, no matter how hard he pushed. Afraid that the elevator door was about to open, he jumped through the glass on the lobby door. As he did this, he felt himself being carried forward on a wave. It lifted him gently up and then tossed him down on the ground in front of the building. Staring at the hotel he saw that every window in the place was pouring blood. It was coming out toward him, gently arcing through the air. Standing up, he turned away to run.

It was dark outside, the moon full in the sky. There was a hotel in front of him, a badly-lit neon side proclaimed it to be "McDonough's Motel." Walking forward, he was standing in front of a door, a glass door. Beside it was a sign that said "lobby." He looked at the door and said, "No." Raising his fist he punched it as hard as he could through the door. There was the sound of shattering glass for a moment, then the pain started, and the blood began to flow.

"No," Schanke shouted as he sat up in bed. Disoriented, for a moment he couldn't quite figure out where he was. Glancing around in panic, he realized that he was in his bedroom at home. Then the pain in his hand hit him. "Ow," he yelped and then looked at his right hand; it was bloody. "Shit!" He jumped out of bed and landed on top of something sharp. Yelling again, he looked down, there were pieces of broken lamp all over the floor. He realized that the china lamp normally on the nightstand on his side of the bed was shattered on the floor. Looking again at his hand, he noticed that the blood was running down his arm as he held it up. Blood on his forearm, blood on his hands, coursing down his fingers as he moved his arm. Blood everywhere. Shaking, he stumbled toward the bathroom and wrapped his hand in a hand towel. He had to get out of here, had to get away from all the blood. Hastily pulling on his clothes, he glanced at the clock. He was late, he realized, he was late for work. Not a good thing since Stonetree had given him the night off before. Had to hurry, had to go somewhere. Where? Had to go to the motel, he decided. Had to find out where all that blood was coming from. He called out to Myra to tell her he was leaving, wondering briefly why the sound of the breaking glass hadn't brought her running, and

then he remembered that she and Jenny had gone out in the afternoon for a girl's night out of dinner, a movie and late night ice cream since there was no school the next day. Looking again at the clock he moved even faster, he'd tell Knight that he couldn't come in. Give him the file that he'd been working on last night. Then he'd find the place. He had to hurry, though.

"Damn it, get out of the way," he yelled from his car at the person who was pulling out of the parking space he wanted. His body shook with agitation, hitting the accelerator he jerked the car into the spot. Slamming the door closed, he rushed into the station. Barely acknowledging the greetings that were tossed out toward him, he hurried over to Nick's desk.

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"Yeah, yeah, something like that. I gotta go." Turning to leave, the detective started making his way back out of the station.

"Where are you going?" Nick shouted after him, and quickly grabbed his leather jacket. Following his friend, he caught up to him in the parking lot. "Schanke, wait." Seeing that he was being ignored, he grabbed his friend's arm and turned him around to face him. "What's going on?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" Knight noticed that his partner was pale and sweating. Grabbing Schanke's hand, he peeled back the cloth slightly. "That needs stitches. Come on, I'll take you over to the hospital."

"No," Schanke retorted, pulling his hand away. "Just leave me alone. I have to go find it." Spinning on his heels, he tried to leave but was stopped again by a hand on his shoulder.

"Find what?" Nick persisted.

"The hotel!"

"What hotel?"

"Never mind, now let me go," Schanke tried to pull away from Nick's grasp. "Let me go," he shouted, struggling to get out of the grip.

Sensing that they were causing a scene, Nick propelled his friend toward his Cadillac. Schanke was still struggling as Nick pushed him up against the car. "I am not letting you go, Schank, until you tell me what's going on," he kept his voice soft and reasonable.

"Nothing's going on. I've got to go someplace, so why don't you just leave me alone!"

"That's not an option. If you've got to go someplace I'll drive you."

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"Why not?"

Schanke looked away from his friend and tried, ineffectually, to get him to release his hold. "Because I don't know where it is," he finally explained.

"Then why do you want to go there?" there was no response, so Nick prompted, "Schanke, look at me. Where is it you'd like to go?"

"Motel, the motel I keep seeing at night," he explained, voice shaking, "I keep seeing it, it's all covered in blood. But I don't know where it is."

"Does it have a name?"

"There's a sign in the dream, it says 'McDonough's Motel'," came the strained answer.

"I think I know where that is. Get into the car and we'll go there together, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, okay, Nick," Schanke gave in, too upset to argue anymore. Nick led him around to the other side of the car and let him in.

They drove in silence through the Toronto night. Schanke sat in his seat, arms wrapped around himself. Nick kept one eye on his friend as he drove. It's my fault, he thought, I did this. The best intentions, I had the best intentions and look

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"Why do I keep seeing it?" the detective asked, "Why do I keep seeing it all covered with blood? Am I going crazy, Nick?"

"No, you're not going crazy, Schank," taking a deep breath, Nick's eyes began to glow red, "Schanke, look at me." Turning a tear-streaked face toward his partner, Schanke looked at him. "Do you remember the explosion, Schanke? Remember the night we came here and the car exploded? That little girl you were talking to was killed. Remember."



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"That's because I stopped to get you some doughnuts," Nick explained, offering him an extra large box. "Thought you'd like to celebrate."

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been stitched, he'd agreed to go talk to the "shrink," as he called the department's psychiatrist. The return to the motel had been a catharsis and he was already returning to his normal self.

"Summers has been brought in. Turns out he was the bomber."

"Why'd he plant a bomb where he lived?"

"It was meant for a partner he was tired of. The car was supposed to be used that night for a job."

"Ah," Schanke nodded in comprehension. "Well, that is a good reason to celebrate. Besides the fact that it's a miracle."

"What's a miracle?" Nick asked, not understanding.

"That Billy and Jenny actually solved a case on their own! Hey, you didn't get any cream filled ones!"

"They were out of them!"

"You could have gone to another shop, you know."

"Didn't your mother ever tell you not to look a gift doughnut in the mouth, Schank?" Nick retorted, smiling.

Call for Papers

RANDALL AND HOPKIRK DECEASED

"But, Geoff!"

"Marty, I don't want to hear it. Not now!" Geoff Randall complained. If anyone had been watching, they'd have thought the old man was off his nut – for to anyone else, Geoff Randall was alone in his room. But he was joined by his old partner, Marty Hopkirk, who had been killed more than twenty years earlier. Marty, still clad in a white on white suit, hadn't aged a day, but the years had not been so kind to Geoff Randall.

Geoff Randall had enjoyed some success as a private investigator. Few knew that his partnership with Marty had continued and flourished after Marty's death. Not even Jeannie ever knew, Lord rest her soul. He remembered Marty's wife fondly, remembered the look on his face when she'd died. And then the look when, for a brief moment, they had seen one another and touched again in the afterlife, before she'd gone on. Geoff was getting old, and his body was starting to fail him. It had been years since he'd been able to walk without the aid of a cane, and now he spent most of his time in a wheelchair. It would be his turn soon, and then Marty would be alone. Marty's curse sentenced him to walk the Earth for 100 years. He worried that Marty might not be able to take the loneliness once he'd gone. That was why this conference was so important to him, but he wasn't prepared to tell Marty that. Even after all these years, Marty was the worrier.

"C'mon, Geoff – they'll have the Ghostbusters there. You *know* what they do – I don't want to end up spending the rest of my afterlife in a containment unit with a bunch of demons and goopers!"

"Marty, the Ghostbusters don't just catch ghosts for the fun of it – there's got to be a reason. If they even notice you, I'll explain. In fact, they might be able to offer some ideas on how you could cut your curse short – maybe time off for good behavior, that sort of thing. And wouldn't you like to meet some other people who can see you, hear you? I mean, after all these years, isn't it getting kind of boring just talking to me?"

"Do I bore you, Geoff?" Marty asked plaintively.

Geoff closed his eyes and shook his head. "No, Marty, you don't bore me. It's just that ..."

"I know, Geoff," Marty said with sudden gentleness. "You're getting older. You'll be moving on, soon. And you won't make the same mistake I did. You won't have to stay."

"Marty –"

"It's all right, Geoff. I never expected you to. It would be silly, wouldn't it – 'cos then you'd end up being alone in the end. You're right, of course. There's a chance someone there might have an idea or two on shortening my time. I'd like to see what the other side looks like. I've waited long enough. And now that Jeannie's ... well, I'd like to be with her."

"Yeah, I know, Marty. I miss her, too. So, I'll accept the invitation, shall I?"

"Yes, Geoff. But how are you going to write this paper they want? The psychic investigations?"

"Tell the truth, I suppose. Too bad I can't use you as exhibit A. Although, maybe someone else there will be able to see you – you never know. Maybe we could present it together," Geoff offered with a teasing grin.

"That'd be nice. Book two seats on the airplane, though, won't you?"

"Why? You can transport yourself, can't you?"

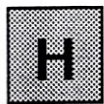
"Yeah, but travelling that way will conserve my energy. And I love the in-flight movie, Geoff."

Geoff Randall sighed. Nothing ever really changed.

The **X** Files

The Bridge

by Tracy Taylor

**Hannock River
Outside Hannock, Maine**

Fox Mulder could not have said why he stopped when he did, not far from the base of the narrow bridge that stretched across the Hannock River, or why he got out of his car. Certainly not to take a breath of fresh air — although he'd been driving south for hours along the coast of Maine, the confinement hadn't been onerous. Despite the frigid, barely-above-zero cold of the dark winter afternoon, the Taurus's heating system had kept him comfortably warm; and he'd been alone with his thoughts, as he'd wanted to be.

As he always seemed to want to be, lately. It was one of the reasons he hadn't taken a plane back to D.C. He simply craved solitude anymore, and a long drive didn't seem too high a price to pay for the luxury. He'd meant to drive as far south as he could before stopping, well into the night if need be, to put as many miles between himself and Maine FBI headquarters as possible, but something moved him to stop by the small bridge, an impulse he couldn't explain. He'd glanced out across the lonely, steel gray expanse of girders, and across the equally steely, silver-gray ribbon of river beneath it, and something about the scene called to him inexplicably. His foot had hit the brake and almost before he'd known it, he'd been gliding the Taurus to a halt at the foot of the bridge.

A moment later, without knowing why, he'd been walking along the elevated concrete sidewalk at the edge of the span. He'd told himself he was stretching muscles that had been cramped too long while driving — that was all. Though why he'd felt the urge to stretch them here, he didn't know. He looked around, distracting himself from unwelcome speculation by viewing the scenery: Banks of green pine forests stretched as far as he could see along the far side of the Hannock, the trees a dark, solid mass beneath the lowering sky.

He seemed all alone here. There was no traffic on the bridge, no boats along the river, nothing at all in sight except a truck heading south on the

highway he'd just left, and it was so far away that he could hardly hear the noise of its passage. The only sound was the quiet hiss of his breathing as he moved, and the harder rapping of his shoes along the concrete, and the silent, the solitude, suited him just fine.

Stopping somewhere near the center of the bridge, he leaned against the railing and stared out over the water, still half-annoyed with himself for this unexpected detour, yet somehow unwilling to get back into his car and resume the long drive toward Washington, either. If the truth were to be told, it didn't seem to matter much, one way or the other — whether he drove on, or stayed right here.

That was getting to be a problem, lately — nothing seemed to matter very much.

He drew a deep, tired breath, watched the white cloud of it drift out and disappear like smoke over the river. His hands tingled with the cold, but although he could've warmed them in his coat pockets, he chose not to. The small discomfort served to remind him that he was still alive, though the world around him was dressed in shades of gray as cold and drab as his heart.

It was odd. He knew he should have been, if not happy, at least satisfied with the outcome of his trip. He'd come here at the request of Fred Dathan, formerly of the Washington Bureau, and now with the Maine Violent Crimes Section, to be in on the capture of Maine's infamous "Father Death," a murderer who'd like to disguise himself as a priest. Dathan had requested his help, initially, in the construction of a psychological profile of the man. And as Dathan was one of the few agents he'd known who didn't scoff at his unconventional theories, and it was for a worthy cause, Mulder had been happy to help. In return, when his profile had proved so accurate that it had helped the VC Section locate the lunatic's hideout, Dathan had invited Mulder to come up for the final manhunt.

A day later, they had him. "Father Death" was safely in FBI hands, and no one had been killed or even wounded when they'd stormed the killer's hideaway cabin, in the Maine woods. One more nut off the streets, he thought, wondering why he found scant satisfaction in the knowledge. God knows, the Violent Crimes boys had been jubilant about it — Dathan in particular. He'd had a hard

time crying off of their victory celebration, afterward, in a local bar. But he hadn't felt like celebrating. He never did, anymore. And the fact that he'd gone numb inside over his work, over what had been the supreme interest and keenest pleasure of his adult life, would have frightened him, if he'd been capable of that emotion, either.

But nothing had frightened him since Scully's death. Her going had taken everything out of him, somehow: fear, anger, joy, curiosity, love ... everything. Even grief, in the end. It was hard to believe, but a year had gone by already since her murder — last week was its grim anniversary. And even the awful pain he'd felt for so long, the agony that had turned his world to ashes, had now become so familiar that not even the return of that date had the power to sear him further.

His cynical society had coined a phrase for his condition: "comfortably numb." The only problem was, though he was totally, bleakly dead inside, he'd never been able to feel comfortable with the fact of his partner's death, and his own continued existence. Though time had passed, it had never gotten any easier for him. He had begun to realize that, barring some cataclysmic act of God, or serious psychiatric help, it never would. And, despite the fact that it was his field, he was even unsure about the efficiency of therapy, in his case. Even with the aid of drugs, for therapy to be successful, its subject had to want to be cured; and therein lay the problem. He had no real reason to try it because he had no great desire to cling to life, to want to hold on in spite of what had happened. He had no family left, few close friends, and (now that Scully was gone) no one that he loved, in all the wide world; and even his work had ceased to please him.

It seemed that, barring some act of God, he had precious little chance of ever being happy again. Looking out over the chilly waters of the Hannock, he reflected bleakly that maybe his emotional shutdown was his way of punishing himself for not saving Dana's life, for not even being there when she'd died ... For never telling her how he felt about her. The truth was, he didn't *want* to be happy anymore — couldn't bear to be, when she would never be happy again, never feel anything again ... Never even draw breath again.

His mouth twisted in an ironic gesture that was all he had left of his once-ready grin. The hell of it was, Dana had died because she'd finally taken a

page from his book, and acted impulsively. It would've been ironic, if it hadn't been so tragic. He'd often wished she'd be a little less logical, a little less the practical scientist and a little more the adventurer ... The only problem was, he supposed bleakly, he should've been a little more careful what he wished for.

For when she'd finally granted that wish, acted on a feeling (a hunch, really) in just the way he would've done, the consequences had been disastrous.

It had happened while they were working on a serial murder case. Not their usual type of case — in fact, they'd only become involved when a psychic began giving the FBI information on where victim #3, thirteen-year-old Kimberly Tomlinson, could be found. The Violent Crimes Section had called them in to evaluate the psychic, Tina Lanitz's, credibility. Mulder had been impressed by her low-key presentation, and was further impressed when the girl's body had been found in precisely the spot Lanitz had said it would be: a woody copse at the edge of an abandoned field.

But something about Tina had rubbed Scully the wrong way. She'd suggested they dig deeper into her background, though she'd known a standard check had already been run. He had put her negative attitude down to her usual unwillingness to believe in psychic powers; and when Dana had suggested interviewing Tina again, with the hope of somehow discrediting her abilities, he'd grown irritated, and refused. They'd already gotten her statement on tape, he'd reminded her — and the girl's body had been found. Further investigation, at that point, would be overkill. He hadn't wanted to waste his time.

He was to deeply regret those words, and that argument, in the days to come. For the result of his refusal to probe further into Tina Lanitz's abilities, or lack of same, had been Scully's stubborn decision to go ahead without him. Without a word to him, she'd decided to visit Tina again, on her own. Rashly, impulsively, she'd done just what she'd usually read him the riot act for: gone off all alone, in hot pursuit of her own hunch.

She obviously hadn't felt the situation had been dangerous, or she would've requested some backup, even if it hadn't been him. But, though she'd had no way of knowing it, she'd misjudged

the situation fatally. As it turned out, Tina Lanitz's on-again, off-again boyfriend, Mark Starley, had been the murderer they'd been looking for. It had been a classic case of inside information: she hadn't had psychic visions of the crime scene, Starley had told her where it had been one night, after he'd had too much to drink. Tina had decided to capitalize on the information, and no doubt get rid of her dangerous lover into the bargain, by going to the FBI with the information. Unfortunately, Starley had unexpectedly come out of hiding and found her first. He had just murdered Tina in retaliation for her betrayal, when Dana Scully had knocked on her front door.

Starley had shot Dana in Tina Lanitz's living room, and then disappeared. By the time Tina's neighbors had called the police to report the gunshots, it had been far too late. Starley had been long gone – and both women were dead.

For a time after Dana's murder, his worst moments had been when he first wakened, in the morning. Then, for just an instant, he would sometimes think it had all been a bad dream: the phone call from the D.C. police, the nightmare trip to the morgue to view Dana's body, the way he'd sat stoically through her funeral a few days later, hardly shedding a tear, then come home to vent his awful grief in private.

On those mornings, in that groggy moment between waking and sleeping, before memory returned, he'd felt an instant of hope, of incredible relief, and thought her death had only been a nightmare, that she'd be there at the Bureau waiting for him when he went in to work ... But then he'd see it. The little pendant Dana had always worn, even in the shower, that her mother had given him at her funeral, as a remembrance of her. He'd put it on his bedside table, not because he'd needed anything physical to remind him of her, but because it had been hers, and he'd loved her, though he'd never told her so. Each time his sleepy eyes fell on it in the morning, he'd remembered, with a jolt, that she was dead. Saw himself again, in his mind's eye, weeping and howling like an animal, all alone in his house after her funeral, finally giving voice to his rage and pain where no one could see him. Her pendant was a silent reminder that she really was gone forever, that he hadn't left the nightmare behind him in sleep, but wakened to it instead.

He'd moved through those mornings blindly at first, hardly knowing what he was doing, going on because he had to, because it was expected, because he could never tell anyone (since he hadn't told her) what Dana had really meant to him; or that he was responsible for her death. If only he hadn't been so stubborn about interviewing Lanitz again – if only he had listened to her, hadn't argued with her, had been more patient ...

The "if-only's" nearly drove him crazy. The only thing he could distract himself with had been the hunt for Mark Starley. He'd thrown himself into the effort with all that was left of his heart, pursued the case relentlessly, to the disapproval of his superiors. But, somewhat to his surprise, his fellow agents had understood, and had stood by him, for the most part. Those who hadn't had taken to muttering things like, "Starley shot the wrong member of the X-Files section," just loud enough for him to hear. He didn't care – in fact, he secretly agreed with that opinion. Wished heartily that it *had* been him who had died, and not Dana; and if there had been any way to live that day over again and somehow change history, he would've done it, and taken the bullet for her. But to understand that, his detractors would've had to have known what he'd never even told Dana herself: that he loved her.

And that was a secret he would carry to his grave, now.

He had missed his chance. Thinking he had all the time in the world, he had held off telling her, waited to see if she showed any signs of attraction to him before speaking – and then it had been too late. She had died, and his chance was gone forever. The cautious silence he'd thought would spare his pride had cost him his heart, instead.

He stared across the river at the pine woods lining its banks, rubbing his hands together absently against the biting cold. The forest looked mysterious in the fading winter light, yet somehow inviting, a place where a man could get lost forever ... He was irresistibly reminded of Robert Frost's lines:

Oh the woods are lovely, dark and deep
but I have promises to keep,
and miles to go before I sleep ...

He had miles to go yet, too, but no promises to keep to anyone ... Not anymore. After more than two months' exhaustive work, he'd caught Mark Starley, and kept the last promise he would ever make to Dana. Now he was free, drifting ... purposeless.

He stared out over the water, feeling very much a part of the wintry scene: a gray man leading a gray life, frozen for a moment in time on an anonymous steel bridge over a colorless river, beneath a steadily darkening sky. Even as he watched, a light snow began to fall, white flakes drifting down to disappear soundlessly into the swiftly moving water.

Just as he could disappear ...

He stared down into the cold, rushing water below, hardly even startled at the thought. He knew he should've been, but he'd been so numb inside for so long that, if anything, the idea seemed rather peaceful. After all, he'd shut down inside, was, in a way, already dead, in most of the ways that counted. Why not send the body where the soul had already gone? Stopping by a river, on a snowy afternoon ...

He peered out over the railing of the bridge, idly calculating how far down the water was. Perhaps thirty feet. Then another mental exercise; a little math to while away the time. How long would it take a dead weight of, say, a hundred and sixty-five pounds to fall that far?

"Now, that's a rather morbid thought, Agent Mulder."

At the sudden sound of a voice behind him, he almost jumped out of his skin. His heart pounded, and he heard a roaring in his ears. That voice! Soft, calm, even serene, definitely feminine, and achingly familiar, it was also utterly impossible. He couldn't be hearing it. For he knew, even before he turned to seek its owner, whose voice it was. A voice he hadn't heard in over a year — a voice that didn't exist.

"Dana?"

He whirled, thoughts of aural hallucinations flashing through his mind, and there she was. Dana. Smiling slightly, as lovely as always — almost as if she hadn't been shot dead, over a year ago.

"No!"

He shuddered all over at the eerie, impossible sight, gasped aloud in mingled fear and horror and sudden, unbearable pain. She couldn't be here, she couldn't, it was impossible! Rationality insisted he would've heard anyone approaching him on the bridge, yet he'd heard nothing ...

Yet his eyes told him that, impossible or not, she was there, looking right at him. He had a wild thought that she must be an imposter, whoever she was, but why would anyone want to perpetrate such a sick joke? Surely not even his worst enemies at the Bureau would go this far — and even if they would, how could they possibly have known he was going to be here, anyway? The answer was, they couldn't — no one could, it had been a spur of the moment decision on his part to stop here. He knew no one had followed him here from the Maine FBI headquarters, either; there had been so little traffic on the highway, he would've spotted a tail at once.

"I'm sorry, Fox," the hallucination apologized. "I didn't mean to frighten you, and it *is* really me."

He blinked rapidly, so frightened, in spite of her gentle reassurance, that his heart was slamming wildly against his ribs. He gripped the bridge's guardrail with shaking hands to steady himself, and kept blinking, in the hope that the hallucination would disappear. He was panting as if he'd run a mile.

But the endless seconds passed, and she didn't vanish. She just stood there, dressed in one her usual neatly tailored suits, quietly smiling at him. To his astonishment, he felt the sudden sting of tears.

"No," he whispered shakily, hardly able to speak. He shook his head in stubborn anger, at the return of his agony. "You're not Dana! You can't be! You're not even real ... You're a figment of my imagination!"

She (he refused to think of her as Dana) raised an auburn eyebrow in sardonic amusement at his disbelief, an expression so familiar that it shook him.

"Well, I must admit, that's not the reaction I expected from you, Mulder," she said softly, taking

a step closer to him. "You're the one who always believed."

He shook his head, backing away. "No!" he ground out, suddenly frightened that he was, in fact, hallucinating very vividly, that he was losing his mind. "I don't believe in this! Not in you!"

She cocked her head curiously at him — another familiar gesture that cut him to the heart. "Why not?" she asked, reasonable as always.

He was starting to believe in her in spite of himself, and that frightened him even more. He swallowed hard. "Because this is impossible!" he cried hoarsely, his voice hollow with pain. "And — because I want it too much," he whispered, knowing it was true.

Her face softened then, with a look of tenderness so warm that it took his breath away. He shut his eyes against the pain of it, hoping desperately that when he opened them again, she would be gone.

"Then look at me, Fox, because I'm really here," she said, her voice filled with compassion. "I'm not a figment of your imagination, and I'm not going to go away until you listen to me."

"You can't be here!" he cried out, his hands tightening on the guardrail until the metal cut into his skin. "You're dead!"

"Yes," she sighed after a moment, so wistfully that he opened his eyes in surprise. "What do you see when you look at me, Fox?"

"A dream," he lied, already half-believing that she wasn't. "A fantasy."

She shook her head, her green eyes holding his. "I hate to break this to you, Mulder," she teased, "but dreams only happen when you're asleep; and you're wide awake, my friend. Look closer, and you'll see that I'm no dream."

He stared at her, wary and confused, and suddenly noticed something very strange. Snow was falling, lightly but steadily, settling on his hair and clothing, coating the sidewalk they stood on, the railing beside him — everything, in fact, but her. The snow didn't seem to touch her. Unlike his, her red hair was bare of snow, her clothes as well.

How could that be, unless ... His mind reeled, teetering on the edge of the impossible.

"You can't make me believe you," he lied desperately, not sure what was reality anymore, except for the grief that made his voice harsh. "You can't be Dana! My partner is dead —"

"I *am* your partner, Mulder!" she cried, sounding faintly exasperated at his continued resistance. She smiled ruefully to herself then, and he spoke before he could stop himself.

"What's funny?"

She shook her head slightly. "It's just that I see how you must have felt all those years, trying to convince me of your theories, without hard evidence," she replied wryly. "I guess I'm not used to taking this side of our old argument, that's all."

He caught his breath painfully. In that instant, he knew she was telling the truth. He believed her. No one else would've said those words, in just that way. Somehow, impossible though it might be, this was Dana Scully! She'd come back from the dead!

His heart pounding with the first real excitement he'd felt in a year, he stepped toward her. "If you really are my partner, prove it to me," he said, curiosity reviving in him as well. If she really had come from wherever it was souls went after death, and he was now convinced she had, how might she have changed? Did she have powers beyond the merely human now?

Her eyes narrowed slightly as she gave him a crooked grin. "Is that what you want, Mulder? Parlor tricks? I'm surprised at you asking such a thing," she chided. Then she sobered, looking deep into his eyes. "Especially when you already believe in me, which makes that unnecessary."

He shook his head, mystified. "How do you know that?"

"One of the benefits of being on this side of the fence, Fox," she said, her green eyes dancing in a mischievous look that he remembered very well. "Oh, I know — don't call you Fox. But under the circumstances, it seems silly to keep calling you by your last name." All at once, her presence wasn't eerie, but unbearably sweet. He'd never thought to see that look, or her, ever again. Or to hear her

say his name, in just that way. He found himself liking the unfamiliar sound of his name on her lips. A sense of wonder filled him, even as he felt the wetness of tears on his cheeks.

"It's good to see you, Dana," he greeted her quietly, not knowing how to put what he was feeling into words. How did one say hello to the ghost of one's partner, anyway? He longed to take her in his arms and hold her, but was terrified to try. It was magic, her being here, like something out of *The Arabian Nights*, tales his mom read to him, when he was a child; he was afraid that, like the mortals in those stories, if he tried to capture a spirit with hands that were only human, she would vanish at his touch, never to return. And he wanted her to stay so badly ...

She smiled happily at his words, at his acknowledgement of her, at last. "I'm glad to see you, too, Fox. I've missed you."

Not half as much as I've missed you, he thought, the memory of her funeral, and its terrible aftermath, flashing through his mind. And all at once, it was as if she had just died, all over again. The pain cut through him, white hot, searing a heart he had thought beyond ever feeling such agony again. He set his jaw against the pain and waited a moment, until he could breathe again. It was ridiculous that he should worry about losing control in front of a ghost, he knew, but there it was. Even now, he didn't want Dana to see him break down, the way he had the day of her funeral.

"I'm sorry if seeing me makes you sad, Fox," she said, very softly. "I never wanted to hurt you."

There was such compassion in her voice, her eyes, that he had to look away, or he would've broken, despite all his determination. For the truth was, he was the one who had hurt her — who was more than a little responsible for her death.

"I know that," he admitted at last. "Why *have* you come, Dana?"

"I came back for your sake." She drew closer to him, so close that he could see every strand of her pretty red hair, so close that he could've reached out and touched her. He set his jaw so tightly against that desire that a muscle twitched in his cheek.

Her green eyes searched his gently, silently, until he had to speak or he would've tried to take her in his arms, no matter the consequences.

"Why?" he asked, to keep his hands from reaching for her.

Although her eyes never left his, she nodded in the direction of the guardrail, and the river below. "To ask you not to do this," she replied somberly.

He didn't even pretend not to understand what she was talking about, or to ask how she knew — or to deny it. She must be able to read his mind, so such denials would be useless. After all, when she'd first appeared, when he'd been silently calculating the length of his leap, she'd *known* exactly what he was thinking, had told him that he was being morbid. So there was no use trying to tell her he hadn't been contemplating suicide — but he suddenly wondered if she knew why. Could she read his every thought, his every feeling, or just some of them? How deeply could the eyes of a spirit peer into a mortal man's soul?

"I'm just tired, Dana," he said quietly at last, wanting her to understand. "I feel ... used up. Useless. Like nothing matters — not even my work." That wasn't the whole truth, but it was part of it, and far more than he had told anyone else.

She looked up at him with wide, earnest green eyes. "That's where you're wrong, Fox," she told him. "I know it's hard for you to see right now, but what you do matters very much. *You* matter, more than you know."

He looked away. "To whom?" he demanded bitterly, thinking of his dead family, his vanished sister, of the friends who would hardly notice if he was gone, the agents at the Bureau who would undoubtedly be glad of it.

"To life itself," she answered.

"What are you talking about?" he snapped, irritated by her oblique answer.

"About life, Fox — your life, and the lives of others. Don't you see how much good you've done?"

He shook his head, not following her.

"All right, then," she said firmly. "I'll tell you. This case you helped Dathan out with, for instance. You saved the lives of five women, Fox! Five women didn't die in pain and terror, because of you."

He stared at her in surprise. There was no use asking how she knew that. How had she known about Dathan, or his case, or his own involvement in it, for that matter? Magic, he thought, by any other name ...

Still, he couldn't take all the credit for another guy's work. "Fred Dathan had more to do with 'Father Death's' capture than I did," he protested.

Dana shook her head decisively. "No. It was your work that caught him, Mulder. Without you, he would've killed five more people, before he was caught. Your profile saved the lives of five women, Fox! Don't you see how important that is?"

Her conviction was so absolute that, despite the fact that her assertion was essentially unprovable, he believed her. For the first time in what seemed like forever, he felt a little proud of himself, of his work — an echo of the way he used to feel, when they'd worked together. His heart lifted in his breast as some of the dead weight he'd been carrying for so long sloughed off silently.

But not all of it.

"So I saved a few lives. That doesn't make me a saint," he contended bitterly. Or any less alone, he thought silently.

"But you're not alone, Fox. At least, you don't have to be. Open your eyes — open your heart, and you'll see."

He set his mouth grimly. He'd forgotten, for a moment, how she could read his thoughts, now. When he didn't answer, she moved even closer to him, until her face was mere inches from his.

"Listen to me," she insisted. "I can't tell you everything that's going to happen, but believe me, you have a lot of fascinating cases in store for you ... A lot more work to do before your career, and your life, will be over. And the world will really be a better place, because you were here. I'd say those are pretty good reasons to live, wouldn't you?"

He swallowed hard, and swung away from her to stare down into the river, almost regretfully. But even then, before he answered her, as he looked down into the rushing waters of the Hannock, he knew he wasn't going to take his own life. Now that he'd seen Dana again, heard what she had to say, he felt a little ashamed of his own self-pity, of the selfish way he'd shot down inside, cut himself off from all human contact, since her death. She was right — if he didn't open his heart, how could he ever be anything but lonely? Hadn't he really been wasting what was really precious — his time, his very life — by burying himself in his work, to the exclusion of all else?

Looking out over the chilly expanse of the river, he swallowed hard again. "All right," he said quietly. He felt, rather than saw, her smile at him, and knew she understood what he meant. But there were other things he still wanted to say, needed to say. He felt a sudden urgency. How could he know how long it would last, this miraculous, otherworldly visit?

"I have to tell you, Dana ... It was my fault. I should've gone with you, that day. I never wanted any harm to come to you, because of our work with the 'X-Files' — but it did, and it's my fault."

She shook her head. "Don't blame yourself! None of what happened was your fault. It was mine," she informed him calmly. "I made a mistake. I should've called for backup, or taken you with me. No one else was to blame. You had nothing to do with it. You would've helped me if you could, I know that."

He closed his eyes at that, drew a deep, shaky breath of relief. God, it was beyond anything, to know that she didn't blame him for her death — to know that she didn't hate him, for not being there when she'd needed him. Another stain lifted from his soul; another weight lifted off of his heart.

When he opened his eyes again, he saw something like regret on her face. She drew a little away from him, and he knew that she was leaving. Panic filled him. "Wait!" he cried. "Dana, don't go! There's so much I have to tell you —"

She smiled, so sweetly and sadly that he wanted to weep. "I can't stay forever, Fox. I only came because you needed me. But you don't need me anymore. You understand now."

Without seeming to take a step, she somehow drifted away from him, and his grief returned, full force. God! She had no idea how he needed her. It had nearly killed him to lose her once. How could he stand to let her go a second time?

"Goodbye, my love," she said, so softly that her words were almost a whisper. His heart stood still nonetheless – then began to beat so hard he thought it would burst.

"What – did – you – say?" he choked, through lips numb with shock. He shivered, and not with the cold.

"I just wanted you to know," she told him tenderly. "So you'd understand why I came back."

Even as she spoke, she was gliding further away. He ran after her suddenly, half-crazed with grief and rage.

"No!" he shouted, unable to let it end so. "No, I don't understand! Are you saying you love me?"

She paused for an instant and nodded, her eyes smiling and ineffably tender. Then she turned and glided away down the sidewalk, into the snow. He sprinted after her, reached out desperately to seize her, only to find that his hand passed right through her, as if she had no more substance than a cloud.

He clenched his fist, beyond frustration. "Why didn't you tell me, Dana?" he demanded, anguished. "Why did you wait so long? Why did you wait until now, when I can't even *touch* you?"

She turned to face him again, for what he somehow sensed was the very last time. Her eyes searched his, more than a little sadly.

"Why did *you*?" she asked. He stared at her lovely face, half-blinded by his tears that made her image waver like a watercolor in the rain. How could he explain the stupidity of his former pride, the cowardly fear that had kept him silent? How apologize for the unforgivable?

Yet he knew he had to try.

"It was the worst mistake of my life," he admitted hoarsely at last, knowing that did not even begin to tell it. He'd been too proud to tell her his heart beat for her, for fear that her rejection would tear

it bleeding from his chest – too blind, until her death, to see that not offering his heart had really been the gravest risk of all.

The irony of it was that, in the end, the heart he had guarded so carefully had been savaged anyway – destroyed by her death. And it had been an empty sacrifice, for she had never known how he cared. But then what more could be expected from such a careful, hollow man?

What more had he deserved?

He stared at her with desperate eyes, thinking that she must be able, now, to see all the way through him to the emptiness inside ... That she must know what an idiot he had been – and how much he'd hated himself for it.

He knew that she did. Yet somehow, she had no harsh words for him, showed none of the scorn he knew he deserved. Instead, she reached out and laid slender fingers on his lips. With a sad, sideways smile, she said very simply, "Mine, too."

He went utterly still, trapped by the revelation in those few words, by the shock of them. All this time, he'd hated himself for keeping silent, never dreaming that Dana had had secrets of her own, that she'd never shared with him. Fools, he thought sadly, the pair of us – and yet he had never loved her more. They stared at each other in silence for a moment, even closer than they had ever been while she'd lived, sadness and joy mingled inextricably in their eyes.

Dana broke the intimate silence at last. "Goodbye, my love," she whispered again. "Forgive us. Live your life, Fox, and be happy." She traced the shape of his lips lovingly as she spoke.

Through the numbness of his shock, and though it was impossible, he somehow felt her touch. Felt something graze his lips, the lightest of caresses, as if a breeze had brushed his face; except that her touch was warm, and there was no breeze. But the effect of her feather-light, incorporeal caress was instantaneous.

He came to life again. A rush of pure wellbeing, of bright joy spread through him, banishing the black depression that had spread over his soul since her death. The change was so intense that he staggered, feeling physically lighter, so light it

seemed, for a breathless instant, as if he might float upward off the bridge, like a balloon. He grabbed for the side rail to steady himself as his mouth curved in his first real smile since before her funeral. In that instant, as she gave him her final gift, he knew just how very much she loved him.

But before he could thank her, or even speak, she drifted away, smiling as she went, graceful as the drifting snow, silent as a dream.

Was that all she was, after all?

"Dana!" he called, in sudden fear. He had to know that he wasn't really imagining all of this, out of sheer loneliness. And there was something he had to tell her, a mistake he had to correct before she disappeared.

"Dana, wait!"

She stopped for an instant, but did not come back to him. "I'm sorry, Fox. I can't stay." Her words floated to him, tinged with love and regret. Yet she stayed where she was, her eyes fixed on him, seemingly as reluctant to leave him as he was to let her go.

"Tell me this is real," he pleaded, wanting to convince that small part of his soul that whispered doubts about his sanity, in the face of this miracle. To his surprise, she grinned at him mischievously.

"In the words of my favorite comedian," she laughed, "Reality – what a concept!" And then she blew him a kiss, and with those words, the last of his lingering doubts vanished. To the marrow of his bones, he knew that she was Dana – that she was real, as real as he. More incredible yet, she'd forgiven him, healed him, given him back his life again. It didn't matter that it didn't make sense, or that he didn't know how she had done it.

Dana Scully had come back from the dead to be with him.

She loved him.

That was enough, and more than enough. He smiled at her, through the ache of his heart, through the tears in his eyes. "Dana," he said tenderly, "I love you. I always did – I always will. And – I believe!"

Even in angels, now, he thought.

Her answering smile was so bright it was radiant. Then he realized her intensity was more than just emotional. She was glowing, with a light even brighter than the snow, whiter than anything could possibly be in the physical world. So brightly that he had to narrow his eyes against her radiance.

"Dana!" he cried, knowing she was leaving but able to bear it now. "Will I ever see you again?"

Somehow, through the white flame she had become, he knew she was smiling. "When it's your time, I'll come for you, Fox," she sang. Even her voice was different now, sweeter than anything human, more like music. "I'll show you the way. And then we'll be together ..."

"When?" he asked, as the blinding light increased, penetrating his tightly closed eyelids, yet somehow not searing or painful. He knew he sounded more eager than he should, but he couldn't help himself. She had revived his formerly legendary curiosity, and he wanted – no, needed – to know more. Entranced by the otherworldly beauty of her voice, her transformation, by this most profound of mysteries, he called out once more.

"Where are you going, Dana?"

He heard a sound like soft bells chiming, and somehow knew it was her laughter. "Oh, no! There are some secrets even *you* aren't meant to know, my love."

The light grew until he felt it must illuminate the Earth. And the real miracle was that, inside of it, in spite of it, the heart of it was still Dana, the one he loved – and who loved him.

The music came to him again, faint and far away now. "I can tell you this, Fox: It's beyond anything you've ever seen in the X-Files! Beyond anything even you can imagine ..."

Slowly, silently, the light died away. He opened his eyes to a mundane screen: a bridge over an obscure gray river, in winter. Yet it was something more than it had been – there seemed magic in the quiet drift of snow over steel, a kind of life force in the rushing river.

Dana was gone. Again, and for the last time.

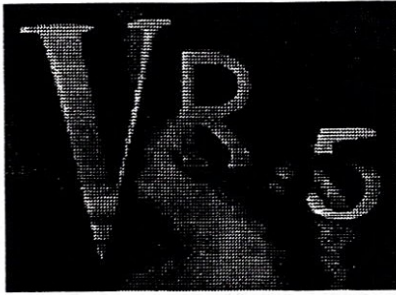
But not for forever — he knew that now.

He sat down on the bridge and drew in a deep, fierce breath, loving the pure coldness in the air, like frosty exultation in his throat. He lifted his head and let the snow fall like cold white feathers on his face, a man alone in a world of white and gray, in a silence broken only by the joyous beating of his own heart.

The world he had known was gone. The man he had become smiled.



Call for Papers



"Well?"

Oliver Sampson stood in the doorway of Sydney Bloom's apartment, raised an eyebrow and glanced dismissively at the large white envelope in Sydney's hand. "Well, what?"

"Are you responsible for this? Are *they*?" Sydney demanded, thrusting the envelope toward him. She was tall, willowy in her own way, with long blonde hair that never seemed to stay in place. She was dressed in a T-shirt and overalls, with heavy boots and neon laces, deep contrast to his sartorial elegance.

"They" were the mysterious and insidious Committee, a shadow organization that had spread its cancerous reach into both their lives, costing Sydney her family, and Oliver his lover. Their interest in her was her family legacy — her ability to go into virtual reality to the fifth level, VR.5. They terrified and fascinated her, like a venomous snake, and the very thought of them infuriated her these days.

"No, of course not," Oliver snapped, shrugging off his elegant top coat and brushing past her into the loft apartment. He was tall, slender, with dark hair brushed back from his forehead. A smile quirked at the corner of his mouth. "They can't get into GI. It's strictly non-partisan."

"Non-partisan? What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that Georgetown Institute is outside the game," he replied with a sigh as he sank into the couch. At her confused look, he explained, "They don't play in politics, and politics don't touch them."

"Nobody's outside of politics," Sydney protested.

"GI is. Oh, they've got their share of office politics, interdepartmental intrigues— what college doesn't? But they've managed to keep their funding sources out of Committee hands, and they've managed to keep their research more or less pure. Not a mean feat of priority juggling, I might add."

"How would they know? I mean, how would they know to avoid the Committee?" Sydney asked, perching herself on the arm of the couch.

Oliver reached over and removed the envelope from her hands. "I imagine because your father once worked with them," he answered nonchalantly. He opened the envelope and extracted the letter of invitation, read it quickly, and passed it back to Syd. "Julianna Moorhouse. Cultural Studies Chair. Also a good friend of the late Dr. Leonard MacKensie, Nobel Prize winner. Physics. Who worked with your father during his brief association with GI."

"I don't remember that — we never lived in D.C. When was this?" Syd demanded suspiciously.

"Before you were born. Actually, before your parents were married, I believe. MacKensie's own son — a professor of Anthropology at GI — was just a child at the time. Some of your father's theories owe their roots to his work with Leonard MacKensie."

"And how do you know this?"

He sighed, then smiled a bittersweet smile. "Sydney, it's all a matter of record with the Committee," he told her gently. "They know everything."

"This?" she demanded, holding up the invitation to the GI paranormal conference.

"Perhaps. It may be ... beneath their notice. Not their cup of tea, as it were."

"No? An international conference of authorities on paranormal phenomena, held at one of the US's most prestigious science institutes? An institute that once employed Dr. Joseph Bloom? C'mon, Oliver — it's right up their alley."

"Sydney, what is it you want me to say? Reject it? Stay home with your computer and your modem and dive into VR? Watch out, or the Committee'll

get you? Or would you rather accept the invitation? Go and have a good time in Washington, D.C.? Smell the cherry blossoms, take a ride on the Metro? Take Duncan with you and let me have a week of peace?"

"Oliver —"

"Bloody hell, Sydney. Look, would it make you feel better if I came along?"

"Why's it so important to you that I go to this thing? What do I know about paranormal phenomena?"

"Some people might say that what you do in VR is paranormal, my dear. If everyone could dial up and slip into a full-sensory experience like you do — if everyone could influence others through it — the Committee would have no interest in you."

"Then why do you insist that this conference wouldn't interest them?"

Oliver steepled his fingers before his face and pondered a moment before replying. "All right. They'll be very interested. But I know Julianna Moorhouse — this conference will be by invitation only. I suspect your invitation is a result of her having once worked with your father. You'll be at the conference. I doubt very much anyone from the Committee will be. Because she won't invite anyone with Committee connections."

"How's she gonna know who's Committee and who's not? I mean, technically, I'm connected with the Committee, even if I wish I weren't."

"That's true. But you're not likely to report back to the Committee, are you?" Sydney shook her head, her blonde hair falling over her shoulder like a waterfall. "I didn't think so." He smiled at her. "Julianna Moorhouse is a formidable woman. Trust me — she'd be able to sniff out a Committee informant."

"Sounds like a regular dragon lady," Sydney observed, returning the smile.

"Oh, she is," he breathed. "Now, hand me that letter again — what is it she wants you to write a paper on?"

Passing the letter over, Syd slid down onto the couch to sit next to Sampson, and leaned forward to study the letter with him.

"Hmm. 'Virtual reality as a link to the psychic'. Interesting. Yes," he said, as if to himself. "I'd bet she knows about MacKensie and Bloom's research. Or at least suspects." He glanced up at her. "You'll have to be very careful about this."

"Wait a minute — you just spent all this time convincing me there's no danger, now you're telling me to be careful?"

"Careful about what you present. A conference like this — the papers will most likely be compiled into a publication, available only to attendees and interested academics, but available nonetheless. None of your father's research should be used in your paper."

"That's easy — I haven't seen much of my father's research — remember, the file Morgan gave me self-destructed."

"Hmm. Well, I'll help you with this. In point of fact, it could be rather fun."

"Fun. Now that's a word I haven't heard you use much."

"Yes, well, there hasn't been much cause. Accept the invitation, Sydney — and put a note in with your acceptance that you'd like to bring me. Duncan, too, if you like. And we'll work together on your paper."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure."

VR.5

(Fox)

Sydney Bloom	Lori Singer
Dr. Joseph Bloom	David McCallum
Nora Bloom	Louise Fletcher
Oliver Sampson	Anthony Head
Dr. Frank Morgan	Will Patton
Duncan	Michael Easton

Premise:

Sydney Bloom lost both her twin sister and her father, Dr. Joseph Bloom, in a freak car accident when she was a child. Her mother, convinced that all three had died in the accident, attempted suicide, and has remained a vegetable ever since. As an adult, Sydney became a hacker and eventually started playing around with virtual reality. Unlike most humans, Sydney was able to enter into the fifth level of VR, and this ability brought her to the attention of the mysterious Committee, an organization whose aims have proved to be less than humanitarian. With Sydney's ability to enter VR.5 and interact with the subconsciouses of the people with whom she's connected by telephone, hers is a formidable power, but the Committee's intentions for that power may be her death.

Episode list (in order by airdate):

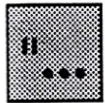
Pilot	Facing the Fire	Unaired episodes:
Dr. Strangechild	Simon's Choice	Sisters
Love and Death	Control Freak	Send Me An Angel
5D	The Many Faces of Alex	Parallel Lives
Escape	Reunion	

Note: Fan efforts to revive VR.5 on Fox continue.



THE REAL
GHOSTBUSTERSSHADOW
CHASERS

Bustin' Shadows

by Pat Dunn
and Diana Lynn Smith

this fellow," Jonathan MacKensie indicated, pulling down a chart which displayed *Ramapithecus* in all his theorized splendor. He looked around at his lecture hall full of students, and took mental note of the ones who showed at least a spark of interest. Most of them seemed bored, or wishing they were anyplace else but the lecture hall of the Georgetown Institute of Science. Jonathan couldn't blame them; the early spring weather was infecting everyone with visions of a glorious summer. Even he was feeling antsy, knowing Dr. Moorhouse was reluctantly allowing him a summer free of chasing her paranormal shadows. He was actually going to Africa on a dig! An ocean away from phantoms, haunted houses, unexplained phenomena — and Edgar Benedek.

Jonathan liked Benny, he really did. But sometimes the tabloid journalist was overly enthusiastic about their assignments. He never listened to reason, never gave serious thought to whatever they were investigating and always went for the bizarre and never the logical, rational explanation. And he never gave a thought to the danger, which meant Jonathan was forever rescuing Benny.

He'd never admit it, of course, but Jonathan rather relished the adventures. He still wasn't a believer in the occult or paranormal, but he had seen a few things which made him stop and think about the possibilities. However, it was time to settle down to the realities of life and get on with his research. His theory about the possibility of a bicameral brain existing in *Australopithecus* and his quasi-contemporary hominids could make his career, give *him* a chance to be the famous Dr. MacKensie of Georgetown instead of his late father, the Nobel Prize-winning Dr. Leonard MacKensie.

"Dr. MacKensie?"

Jonathan jerked his attention back to the moment and smiled at the student. "Yes, Maris?"

The girl was staring open-mouthed at the chart behind him, and her finger was trembling as she pointed. In fact, most of his students were staring in disbelief and some were scrambling from their seats. A couple were trying to hide under their chairs, while others were running for the doors. Puzzled, Jonathan turned around and fell back a step.

Ramapithecus was floating in the air!

"But — but —" Jonathan stammered, backing against the lecture table as the protohominid slowly swirled above his head.

The blank chart, on which the drawing had been, rolled up with a sudden snap, and Jonathan jumped at the noise, then yelped and ducked as the apparition bared its teeth at him and swung a hairy fist at his head.

"Don't panic, class!" Jonathan shouted, clutching the pointer he had been using in front of him like a weapon. "This is an — unusual situation, but we mustn't —" He broke off as the apeman dove at him, and reacted by waving the pointer straight through it. "It's not real — it can't possibly —!"

With a roar, *Ramapithecus* seized Jonathan's throat in both of its hands and began to squeeze. It *felt* real enough, Jonathan thought muzzily as his air supply began to be cut off. He heard screaming from his students, then everything went black.



r. MacKensie?" Randy said worriedly.

Jonathan opened his eyes and blinked, then put a hand to his throat.

"Randy —? Is it gone? What happened?"

"I don't know," the girl admitted, looking down at him from her wheelchair. "One minute you were talking, and the next thing I knew that — that whatever it was floated off the chart and headed for you. I thought he — it — was going to kill you! Are you okay, Jonathan?"

His throat ached and he wondered if there were bruises from the creature's fingers. "It's not possible," he muttered, his voice raspy.

"Maybe not, but it *did* happen — we all saw it," Randy insisted as he sat up.

"Where did it go? Did it just vanish — go 'poof', as Benedek would say?" Jonathan wasn't ready to believe, but in the face of hard evidence — his throat was proof enough — he couldn't deny it.

"It — it went out the door, after some of the kids."

Jonathan pushed himself to his feet, patted Randy's shoulder, and then shook his head to clear it. "So *Ramapithecus* is running loose on the campus — wonderful. Dr. Moorhouse is going to love this." He gazed consideringly at the rolled-up chart, then cautiously approached it and slowly pulled it down.

Blank.

Well, not totally blank, if he was going to be honest. The word "*Ramapithecus*" was still emblazoned on the white paper, but the spot formerly occupied by an artist's conception of the protohominid was noticeably bare. Squinting, he thought he could make out the faint outlines of the drawing, but it could have been his imagination.

Imagination. He'd once told Benedek that he lacked an imagination, but in truth he just didn't possess one as vivid as the journalist's. Or Dr. Juliana Moorhouse's, for that matter. He certainly couldn't imagine how they were going to deal with a rampaging *Ramapithecus*.

One finger tentatively touched the blank chart. It felt like normal paper ...

"MacKensie!"

The chart rolled up with a loud snap, and Jonathan whirled around. "Dr. Moorhouse, I —"

"This is fascinating! Positively intriguing," his department head announced gleefully, her eyes seemingly twice as large as normal behind her huge glasses.

"Well, I suppose one could call it that, but terrifying is a better word," Jonathan argued, one hand automatically going to check the knot of his tie. Juliana Moorhouse always made him feel gawky, inadequate and as if he just couldn't measure up to Leonard MacKensie — and never would.

"What could have caused this phenomenon?" Moorhouse continued, ignoring Jonathan's comment, as she often did.

"I have absolutely no idea, Dr. Moorhouse. I pulled the chart down, just as I always have, and the next thing I knew there was utter chaos."

"This chart?"

"Dr. Moorhouse, I — yes," Jonathan said, watching as she pulled it down and studied the blank spot.

"We must have this analyzed at once," she decided in her usual brusque manner. "See to it, MacKensie."

"Yes, Dr. Moorhouse," he sighed, recognizing defeat when he saw it — his defeat and her victory, of course. Would it ever be any different?

"I wonder why this particular fellow? Why not *Australopithecus Afarensis* or *Homo Habilis*? *Homo Neanderthalensis* or *Homo Erectus*?" she asked, pulling down each chart and nearly giving Jonathan heart failure. He hurried along behind her, rolling each chart up before any of the primitive men decided to join their already-roving brother. "You must be the key, MacKensie. *Ramapithecus* is your particular favorite, the cornerstone of your theory, I believe."

"Me? Now, Dr. Moorhouse —"

"It was your class, your chart, your interest. Yes, you must be the key," she continued to theorize over his objections.

"Even if I knew how to — to do such a thing, I wouldn't!"

"No, you don't lean toward sensationalism ... Benedek," she announced, her mouth puckering as if she'd just tasted something sour. "It's just the sort of sensationalistic, grandstanding stunt he delights in — him and that — that fish-wrapping!"

"You mustn't jump to conclusions, Dr. Moorhouse! You don't know that Benedek is involved in this —"

"Don't I?"

"Well, you have your suspicions, of course, and I must admit it is the sort of thing Benedek would

enjoy, but I really don't think even he is capable of something this extraordinary," Jonathan pointed out, defending Benny.

"It had better not be the result of some ridiculously-expensive potion created by that Theo person," Moorhouse warned, frowning at the hapless professor.

Jonathan swallowed and nervously ran a finger under his tie. If she ever found out what the real purpose for the twenty-five hundred dollar potion was, he was a dead man. It hadn't been *his* fault that Theo's "love potion" had seriously damaged the furnishings of one of the finest restaurants in St. Louis, after all, and he'd *tried* to talk Benedek out of sticking the Institute with the bill ... "No, Dr. Moorhouse, I don't believe Theo's involved this time." Although, come to think of it, Benedek *would* do almost anything to play a prank on Jonathan ... He shook away that unpleasant thought and added, "The — er, apparition — seemed quite solid. It attempted to throttle me. Do you suppose it might harm anyone else?"

"What an alarming idea," she observed, her eyes glinting with an emotion closer to delight than alarm. "Campus security is scouring the area for it now, though I don't know what *they'll* be able to do against it if they find it. This is positively intriguing ... There are documented cases of spirit manifestations inflicting physical harm upon their victims, but those are generally invisible." She was staring thoughtfully at his neck, and Jonathan wondered if the creature's fingers had left bruises. He reached up and rubbed his throat, wincing a little. "MacKensie," his superior declared, "you're relieved of all classes starting immediately. I want you on this investigation full-time. *This* is going to put Georgetown's Paranormal Research Unit on the map!"

Jonathan opened his mouth to protest, but before he could raise his voice above a croak, she had swept out of the room as suddenly as she had entered it. He sighed and looked at Randy. "Would you like to help me make a phone call?"

"Sure, Dr. MacKensie, but I already called Benny."

"And here he is!" a cheerful voice announced, as the irrepressible Edgar Benedek sailed into the classroom. "Whoa, Jack, looks like the lecturing business is getting dangerous!" He picked his way around several abandoned textbooks lying on the

floor, and came up on the platform beside Jonathan and Randy. "You look a mite peaked, Jonny," he observed, peering at the professor's bruises. "Are you okay?"

"Am I okay? I was nearly strangled to death by — by — well, never mind about that —"

"Hey, that's why I'm here, isn't it? So, where's the roving Ramapithecus?" Benny asked with the enthusiasm that seemed to be his trademark. "Uh-oh, I don't see the ever-loving Dr. M — he didn't throw her over his shoulder and haul her off to his love nest, did he? RAMPAGING RAMAPITHECUS RAVISHES —"

"Benedek!" Jonathan exclaimed in horror, cutting off the journalist's headline announcement. "Dr. Moorhouse is just fine! She's no doubt back in her office, safe and sound."

"Too bad — she could use a little loosening up," Benny suggested with a shrug and wicked grin. "So what's the scoop, Dr. J? Randy was just a little excited when she called, but it sounded like my kinda action. Good thing she caught me before I'd finished packing my bags for home, or you'd be dealing with this one all by your lonesome."

"It all happened so fast," Jonathan said, running a hand through his hair. "One moment I was lecturing on —"

"The whys and wherefores of Ramawhosis," Benny cut in helpfully.

"— the exciting possibilities presented by the discovery of Ramapithecus," Jonathan continued, frowning at Benny. "I pulled down the chart and the next thing I knew I was being strangled by what appeared to be Ramapithecus himself."

"It just stepped right off the chart, Benny! It was incredible!"

Benny grinned at Randy's eagerness.

"The chart was blank after the — the incident," Jonathan admitted. He put a hand to his throat and winced. "And whatever it was, it had unbelievable strength."

"Jonathan, I mean, Dr. MacKensie passed out! And he's got bruises," Randy added helpfully.

"Dr. Moorhouse suspects you, by the way," Jonathan put in, looking at Benny.

"I wasn't even here! What does she think, I got some kinda remote control spell or something?"

"Something like that," Jonathan agreed, his eyes narrowing suspiciously. "You didn't, did you?"

"I'm crushed, Jack! To think that you still don't trust me, after everything we've been through together!"

"Oh, well, it isn't that, exactly —" Jonathan stammered, watching nervously as Benny pulled down the chart in question and peered at it intently. "Sorry, Benedek. I suppose it's easier to think this is one of your pranks than to believe that it was actually a — uh —"

"Haunting, Jonny? Well, don't you worry your gray cells about this any longer, 'cause I've got the solution!"

"You do?"

"Yep. We'll just call a few buddies of mine down from New York, and see what they can make of this case."

Jonathan was shaking his head. "I don't think Dr. Moorhouse will want to have you bring in another wall-feeler or ventriloquistic medium, Benedek —"

The journalist raised his hand. "These guys are *scientists*, Jack! They use fancy gizmos and everything. You know, you even remind me of Egon, a little bit — except that he's a believer, of course."

"A believer in what?" Jonathan asked, his brow furrowed.

"Ghosts, of course!" Benny grinned and added, "Poltergeists, demons, minor deities — you name it, they've busted it! They'll be happy to help us out. Now where did I put that number — ?" He patted the pockets of his Hawaiian print shirt, giving a cry of triumph when he found a battered little black book.

Randy looked thrilled. "I've always wanted to meet the Ghostbusters," she confided to Jonathan as Benny thumbed through the worn pages.

At the name of the well-known group of paranormal-elimination specialists, Jonathan looked doubtful. "Aren't their fees rather high? Perhaps I should consult with Dr. Moorhouse before —"

Benedek turned a serious gaze on him. "The best costs money, Jack. Maybe I can get Peter to cut us a deal, seeing as how he still owes me one for that time I helped him out in New Orleans."

"Well-I — all right. Call them."

"Grrreat!" Benny headed for Jonathan's office, and the others followed him. "You know, Jon-Boy, this just may be the very story that will make you as famous as ol' Leonard," he continued as he perched on the edge of Jonathan's desk and picked up the phone. "DOCTOR JONATHAN MACKENSIE DISCOVERS ACTUAL — Janine, my own true love! How ya doin', doll face? Grrreat! Listen, I need to talk to Peter and Egon — they're gonna love this! Pete might even be willing to do this one for free, just for the exposure. Hey, we'll pay their expenses, first class all the way. Didn't Jordy make good on that check? Oh, well, maybe I'd better talk to Egon first."

"First class? How many of them are there?" Jonathan squeaked in protest but Benny ignored him, as he usually did whenever Jonathan got on the subject of the expense account.

"Spengs, old buddy! Have I got a wild one for you, boy-o! Hear me out, E-man. How does this grab you? PREHISTORIC MAN GOES TO COLLEGE. No, I'm not referring to Jordy Kerner! I'm here at the Georgetown Institute of Science with my pal, Jonathan MacKensie. Dr. Jonathan MacKensie, son of the late-great Leonard MacKensie — yeah, that's the one. Right, the Paranormal Research Unit."

Jonathan moaned and covered his face with one hand as he sank down into his recliner.

"We've got a problem here that I think calls for the Ghostbusters — how soon can you guys get here? Better bring every trick you've got, pal — this is bigger than Gozer, I'm telling ya. Jack teaches anthropology — well, just as a side thing — and anyway, today he was attacked by Ramapithecus! Hey, I've got Jonny right here — he can fill in the details."

With obvious reluctance Jonathan accepted the receiver that Benny extended to him. "Hello? Yes ... no, not a fossil. It came off the wall-chart, actually ... No, it wasn't transparent, it was extremely solid ... Well, all of it ... Yes, it was certainly free-floating ... It tried to choke me to death, Dr. Spengler. I believe that indicates it poses a certain threat, don't you? Yes, there were witnesses ... Very well." He handed it back to Benny. "He wants you and Peter to discuss fees. Don't make too many promises, Benedek."

"I was hoping Egon would be so excited about it *he'd* talk to Peter about the fees," Benny muttered as he took the receiver. "Doctor V, how's it shakin'? Leg heal up okay? Grreat! Listen, my pal here has a real emergency that calls for the best Ghostbusters in the business. Hey, you're not the only ones I know, just the best and Georgetown Institute only uses the best. Yeah, Georgetown Institute of Science in Washington D of C. This is really big, Pete, I'm telling ya. Just ask Egon about Ramapithecus. Ramapithecus – don't you keep up with the latest in anthropology? Well, Jack was attacked by one! Yeah, I'll hold while you talk to the big guy – but just remember New Orleans."

Benny fell silent and Jonathan opened his mouth, but Benny held up a hand to silence him. The journalist strained his ears, hoping to catch any snatch of the conversation on the other end of the line but Peter had put him on hold. "Rats," he said, looking at Jonathan and shrugging his shoulders. "Whatever happened to just covering the phone with your hand? How's a guy supposed to hear anything when he's on hold?"

"I believe that's the whole idea," Jonathan commented dryly.

"You're no – yo, Pete! What's the decision? Grreat! Hustle your buns down here as fast as you can. First class all the way, boy-o. Drive down? Nah, we'll rent you a car – that much stuff, huh? We'll pay for the extra luggage." This statement made Jonathan moan and bury his face in his hands. "Slimer? Better leave him in New York – I don't think ol' GI – or Jack – is ready for Slimer."

"Slimer?" Jonathan mouthed silently but Benny ignored him.

"By the time you get to the airport your tickets will be waiting," Benny promised, grinning at the professor. "Yes, Peter, they'll be paid for in advance – credit cards are wonderful, aren't they? Rental car, too, I swear. Big enough for your equipment – got it. Check ya later!"

"Benedek!"

"Take a chill pill, buds," Benny cajoled, holding up his hands to forestall Jonathan's protests. "The best doesn't come cheap, but you don't want to mess around with second rate Ghostbusters, pal."

"Ghostbusters," muttered Jonathan. "I can't believe that Dr. Egon Spengler is affiliated with them ... He seemed so intelligent when I met him at that Paranormal Conference you and Dr. Moorhouse dragged me off to last spring." That had been their second attempt to attend the gathering of parapsychologists, the first having been interrupted by their charter plane's crash near the White Wood asylum.

"Have you met the other Ghostbusters, Dr. MacKensie?" Randy inquired.

He shook his head. "Not in person, no. I've read some of the papers published by Dr. Venkman and Dr. Stantz, however. And of course Benedek knows them all intimately." Jonathan gave Benny a quizzical look and added, "At least, it certainly *sounds* as if he does."

"Pete and I go waaay back, Jon-Jon," the journalist claimed, the telephone receiver pressed between his shoulder and neck as he flipped through the phone book for the airline's number. "The others are great guys, too. You'll like them."

"I'm looking forward to it," Jonathan said, only half-sarcastically. He had to admit to a certain curiosity about his unreal experience, and a secret satisfaction that the students had also witnessed the ... phenomenon. Perhaps Dr. Moorhouse was right, and this really was the breakthrough the Georgetown PRU needed.

Not that he *wanted* the PRU to succeed, of course. He'd never get the grant for his *real* research if the paranormal research became successful – he'd be stuck doing Dr. Moorhouse's "intriguing" and "bizarre" projects for the rest of his life. On the other hand, if he could take such a ridiculous premise and make it successful, it would look

impressive on his resumé. Moorhouse really wanted for him to prove the existence of paranormal phenomena, but proof positive either way was the goal set down by the Board. Hard, scientific facts supported by indisputable evidence which proved there were no such things as ghosts, vampires, goblins, little green men from Mars — *that* was Jonathan's goal.

Although ... he was becoming less cynical about "bizarre occurrences" after things he'd seen lately. He still hadn't come up with an explanation for the damaged concrete caused by the "flaming spear from nowhere" having been repaired so quickly, and without a trace of the damage. Even his first case, the so-called haunted house in Fartham, still had some loose ends he couldn't satisfy.

He touched his neck and winced — he certainly hadn't imagined *that*.

"Okay, Smilin' Jack, arrangements are underway and the Ghostbusters should be here in a couple of hours. Let's make tracks," Benny urged cheerfully, finally hanging up the phone.

"Tracks? To where?" Jonathan asked, obediently trailing after his partner.

"Ramapithecus hunting, of course," Benny informed him, pulling a compact camera from his sock. "We're hot on the trail of a monster!"

"Benedek, you can't be — Benny!"

Well, Egon, I hope we haven't just been suckered in by another of Benedek's wild schemes," Peter Venkman said, a frown wrinkling his forehead as he hung up the phone. "Don't we have enough to keep us busy here in the Big Apple without running down to D.C.?"

"I wouldn't have been so insistent, if I hadn't spoken with Dr. MacKensie," Egon replied seriously, his red-framed glasses sliding down the bridge of his nose. "He sounded quite sincere, and I don't believe he would condone one of Benedek's schemes, much less participate in one."

Peter reached over and shoved the forever-slipping glasses back up to the bridge of Egon's nose, and then leaned back in his desk chair. "Just because

a guy has a PhD doesn't make him a saint, big guy. Hey, I've got *two* of 'em myself —"

"I have a great deal of respect for Jonathan MacKensie as well as for his father, Dr. Leonard MacKensie," Egon shot back a bit huffily. "Dr. MacKensie is a serious academician, a professor of anthropology at one of the finest scientific universities and quite brilliant in his field."

"Brilliant, huh? Then what is he doing hanging around with a con-man tabloid journalist?"

Egon raised an eyebrow. "One might just as well ask why I associate with you, Peter."

"Yeah? Why do you?"

"Because we're friends," the physicist answered. "Most of the time, anyway."

"Oh, yeah." Peter looked as if he'd forgotten that detail. "So you really believe this hokey story about some prehistoric man coming to life? And what can we do about it, anyway?"

"Dr. MacKensie said it tried to strangle him so we obviously cannot allow such a danger to run free," Egon explained, pointing out the obvious that Peter had forgotten. "We must discover how — and why — this creature has come into existence, and it must be captured."

"Why does it have to be us? Can't this MacKensie handle it?" Peter whined. "It sounds dangerous, Egon."

"Yes, it does. MacKensie is an anthropologist, Peter, not an expert in the paranormal, despite his involvement with the Paranormal Research Unit. It's not his primary field, and I have the distinct impression it's not even an interest of his."

"Then why —"

"Dr. Juliana Moorhouse."

"Oh," Peter said significantly. "Got it. She could give my dad lessons in manipulation." He paused and shuddered, then continued, "I remember her all too well. If MacKensie is in her clutches, he doesn't stand a chance."

"Now, Peter, just because she didn't fall for the Venkman charm doesn't —"

"She made me study! One class, Egon, that's all I had with her, and I'll never forget Ironfist Moorhouse. Ray was lucky she was only filling in for that one term and he didn't have to take her class."

"I doubt that Ray would have had your problem with Dr. Moorhouse," Egon observed mildly. "He wasn't in a power struggle with the professors, and Ray was more than willing to study."

"Study what?" Ray Stantz inquired as he paused by the half-partition that separated Peter's "office" from the rest of Ghostbuster Central. His jumpsuit was splattered with drops of greenish slime, and he carried a smoking ghost-trap, indicating that he and Winston Zeddemore had just returned from a successful bust.

"Peter was just recalling our college days," Egon offered, when the psychologist muttered something and looked sulky. "I assume the dockside poltergeist case went well?"

"Class Two, like you guessed, Egon," Ray announced, holding up the trap like a trophy. "Pretty routine. Almost *too* routine, in fact ... Sometimes I wish —"

"Don't start *that* again," Peter interrupted. The last time Ray had expressed a longing for more challenge and excitement, they'd gotten it, in spades. "Anyway, it looks as if we'll be spending the weekend out-of-town."

Winston joined them in time to overhear this last comment. "Not Jersey again, I hope."

"Almost as good. Try Washington, D.C."

The veteran raised an eyebrow. "Better not be the White House calling about Lincoln's ghost — we don't bust the good guys."

"Nah, it's just some professor at Georgetown Institute complaining that King Kong or something tried to kill him." Peter enjoyed the interested glances from the newcomers, then added darkly, "And if Edgar Benedek is lying about this one, I'll kill *him*!"

"Peter." Egon's quelling glance silenced the psychologist, and he gave Ray and Winston a brief outline of his discussion with Jonathan MacKensie,

concluding with, "I believe this case could have some fascinating possibilities."

"Sure sounds like it," Ray enthused. "This is gonna be great!" He headed for the basement, calling over his shoulder, "As soon as I stow this ghost, I'll get started on the packing!"

Peter sighed, Winston chuckled, and Egon looked self-satisfied.

"You knew that would happen, didn't you?" Peter accused the physicist. "All you have to do is get Ray on your side —"

"As you frequently do," Egon pointed out.

"Well, that's different," Peter dismissed with a shrug. "Guess I'd better go pack my bag. Ought to be a few interesting women on campus."

"Pete never changes, does he?" Winston asked, shaking his head.

"About some things, no," Egon agreed, watching as Peter hurried up the stairs to the bunkroom. "But I am aware of several ways in which Peter has changed since I first met him, and most for the better, I think."

"You mean like his attitude about Christmas?"

"For one, yes. And despite his preening and bragging, he isn't nearly as egotistical and self-serving as he once was. I believe Ray is responsible for those changes," Egon said thoughtfully.

"From what I've seen, I'd say the influence works three ways, Egon," Winston told him.

"Or four," Egon added softly, looking at the newest addition to the team. Winston had only been a part of their group since Gozer's attack on New York City, but in many ways it seemed as if he'd always been a part of them. He had filled the Winston-sized niche, making them complete and bringing his own unique skills to the Ghostbusters. A practical head being one of the most important, since the two dreamers often forgot the more mundane aspects of life when they were wrapped up in an exciting project, and Peter preferred to ignore them as long as possible. It was often Winston who saw to it that chores were done and groceries purchased, and Winston who played

mother hen. Peter saw to the paperwork and finances, leaving Ray and Egon free to be the dreamers and to pursue flights of fancy.

"So what is this Ramawhattzis, anyway?" Winston asked as they followed in Peter's wake.

"Ramapithecus was once thought to belong to the pongid rather than the hominid line but recent reevaluation indicates Ramapithecus appears to be the first recognizable member of the purely human branch," Egon explained in his lecturing mode. "This is, of course, only speculation at this point due to a lack of definitive evidence."

"Uh-huh," Winston said dubiously, looking askance at the blond man. Egon seemed to know more than any one human being ought to, on an infinite variety of subjects. "Which sounds like a scientific way of saying this thing may or may not exist, right?"

"An insufficient number of fossil remains have been found at this point to fully document Ramapithecus," Egon admitted. "Nevertheless, many anthropologists, including Dr. MacKensie, believe that it may be a so-called 'Missing Link' between apes and humans."

"That's great, but monkey-men just don't crawl off of wall-charts and attack professors," Winston pointed out.

"Not as a general rule, no."

Winston shrugged. "I'm hitting the shower before Ray gets up here." He shook one slime-covered arm, sending little splatters of slime which Egon dodged with lightning reflexes. "Sure hope this Ramawhattzis doesn't slime," the black man muttered as he headed for the bathroom.

Rubbing his chin consideringly with one hand, Egon went to his lab to select what equipment might be useful.



ell, it can't have just vanished," Benny complained, snapping off his tiny tape recorder and shoving it in his breast pocket.

"Why not? It *did* just appear," Jonathan pointed out, hoping that the creature was truly gone.

"Listen, pal, we've followed its tail all the way across campus," the journalist argued. "The thing left a trail a mile wide, and everyone we've run into has seen it. And then 'poof' — no more monster."

"So we don't need your expensive paranormal eliminators —"

"Wrong-o, pal — we need 'em now more than ever. We've got to be ready for ol' Rama when he shows up again — *and* he will, trust me. He didn't just pop off that chart to shake your hand, Jack, and we've gotta find out what he's up to before he does it."

"What do you suggest, Benedek? Try to interview it for the *National Register*?"

The reporter shrugged and slanted Jonathan a hurt look that made him regret his flippant words. "Maybe for once I'm interested in something else besides a great story, Jack. Maybe this time I'm after it 'cause it tried to off a friend of mine."

"Benny, I'm sorry — I didn't mean ..."

"It doesn't matter. C'mon, let's go grab some dinner someplace and go over these witness reports." He'd filled up one mini-cassette with interviews with students and faculty who had seen the creature.

"All right." Jonathan turned back the way they'd come, and added quietly, by way of apology, "My treat, Benedek."

"Grreat!" Benny enthused, all trace of hurt feelings vanishing. "I've got a hankering for lobster!"

"Lobster?" Jonathan squeaked, his voice going up an octave as only Benny could evoke. "I was thinking more of hamburgers — !"

"You've got to learn to expand your horizons, J.J.," Benny encouraged, draping a companionable arm around Jonathan's shoulders for a moment. "Where's your sense of adventure?"

"Probably in the same place as my mind," the professor retorted and Benny just gave the evil chuckle which Jonathan would always associate with the journalist.

"At least this time you won't have to worry about Theo's exploding powder destroying the restaurant," Benny said, failing to reassure Jonathan.

"I'm sure you'll manage somehow to liven up things."

"Lively? You want lively? Wait until Pete Venkman gets here!"

Jonathan paused, staring at Benny. "But —"

"We've had some wild times, let me tell you, pal. Pete is the original party animal," Benny announced with his ever-present cheerfulness.

"But — they're coming to deal with our — our phenomenon, not party!"

"Hey, there's always time for a party!" Benny proclaimed, clapping Jonathan on the shoulder. "Now let's go review this baby," he added, patting his pocket bulging with the tape recorder. "The guys oughta be here pretty soon, so we need to have our story ready. Egon is even more of a pain than you are when it comes to solid facts and documentation."

Jonathan nodded slowly, mollified. Despite the Ghostbusters' flash and dazzle reputations, they *were* scientists, and would be qualified to aid in this investigation. "That does sound like the best plan. Let's try the Surf and Turf — I think I could use a steak, after everything I've been through today."

"You're on, Jon-Jon!"

"This is the perfect vehicle?" Peter Venkman exploded as the Ghostbusters stood by the rental car. He dropped his suitcase on the pavement, next to his proton pack. "This is what Benedek does! He makes promises and never follows through — !"

"Maybe he didn't realize we'd need a full-size vehicle," Egon speculated, looking at the compact car.

"Yeah, Peter, don't get mad at him yet," Ray said, juggling his proton pack and his suitcase.

"We'll never get all this stuff in there, let alone fit all of us in," Winston complained, shaking his

head as he looked at the pile of equipment they'd brought along. "I'm gonna go talk to the clerk."

"Probably got us rooms at the local fleabag, too," Peter grumbled, kicking his suitcase which was leaning against his proton pack. "No doubt expects the four of us to squeeze into one room."

"Now, Peter —"

"I knew we shouldn't have come," Peter continued to rant, pacing the pavement. "Why do we have to run halfway across the country —"

"Washington D.C. from New York City isn't halfway across the country, Peter," Egon corrected, pushing his glasses up on his nose.

"Yeah, Peter, it's just a couple of hours really," Ray said with his everpresent optimism. "I mean, it's not like we've gone to Washington state."

"This is a city, not the countryside so you shouldn't have any complaints about civilization," Egon observed mildly, used to Peter's tantrums.

"This may be a city, but it's not New York."

Ray and Egon exchanged glances and sighs. Peter was not going to be talked out of this temper tantrum. "Perhaps we should have left you at home with Slimer," Egon suggested, giving Peter a stern look.

"It's cool, guys," Winston called, running across the parking lot from the rental office. "Our car is one aisle over."

"Gee, Peter, I wonder how we made that mistake?" Ray asked, all innocence as he picked up as much of their gear as he could.

"Yeah, Pete, who led us to this section?" Winston put in, grunting as Peter threw a duffel bag at him.

"Okay, okay, so I got a little confused," Peter snapped, "helping" Egon with some of the luggage by loading down the physicist with as much as he could hold. "No big deal."

"Really? You were certainly making it into one," Egon observed, following Winston to the correct vehicle.

"Wow, this is great!" Ray exclaimed, looking at the minivan. "See, Peter? Benny didn't let us down."

"Yet," Peter muttered, reluctant to give up his bad mood and his certainty that they'd been suckered. "He's just like my dad ..."

"Ah." Egon looked over the top of his glasses at Winston and nodded. This one comment explained a lot about Peter's attitude. His conman father had been a disappointment to Peter all his life, never being around when Peter needed him, and neglecting holidays. He was the reason Peter had fought so hard against Christmas.

"What 'ah', Egon?" Peter asked suspiciously, pausing in loading the minivan.

"What scheme did Benny involve your father in?"

"Huh?"

"Well, for you to be so anti-Benedek, he must have involved your innocent father in some scheme or other in which your father came out on the short end of the deal," Egon theorized reasonably.

"Well-I, actually it was his dad," Peter admitted reluctantly.

"I see. So you're blaming Benny for something his father did. I suppose that makes a warped sort of sense," Egon commented, handing Peter his suitcase to put in the van.

"Gee, Pete, it's not Benny's fault his dad is the way he is," Ray protested with his wide-eyed innocence. "It's not right to blame a guy for something he can't control."

"True, Raymond, a man cannot control the actions of his father," Egon observed. "Can he, Peter?"

Peter threw Egon's duffel bag into the back of the van with more force than was necessary. "Maybe not, but he can take responsibility for his own actions and the results thereof," he finally retorted, turning to glare at his friends, his hands on his hips.

"So there is more to the situation with Benedek than merely his father," Egon surmised, handing Peter a proton pack.

"Yeah, a lot more. Are we gonna just stand around here and gossip or are we here to work?" he challenged before placing the pack in the van.

"Work, of course," Ray said, taking pity on Peter. "Do we know where to find Dr. MacKensie?"

"Let's try his office at the university," Egon suggested. "He is expecting us, and with the possibility of the creature still running loose on the campus, no doubt he's there."

"Okay guys, let's go," Winston called, getting behind the wheel and buckling up. He unfolded the map the rental car agency had provided and spread it over the steering wheel. "What's the name of this place again?"

"The Georgetown Institute of Science," Egon supplied, snapping on his own seat belt.

"Got it," Winston announced after a couple of minutes. After folding the map to display the necessary section, he handed it to Egon and switched on the ignition. "Too bad we don't have Ecto — her siren would clear traffic out of the way."

"We're not in that big of a hurry," Peter answered from the back of the van, placing his hands behind his head and leaning back. "Maybe we ought to stop at a Burger Barn or something."

"We did leave before dinner," Ray pointed out hopefully. "And they only served peanuts on the shuttle."

"Yeah, but they were honey-roasted," Peter quipped.

"I could go for a burger," Winston admitted. "Egon?"

"Gentlemen, there is a paranormal creature running loose on a college campus, wreaking havoc," the physicist reminded them. "I believe that is more important than our stomachs."

"Guy's gotta be at his peak," Peter argued. "I chase monsters better on a full stomach."

Ray, always the peacemaker, said, "Let's stop at a restaurant first, and call Dr. MacKensie from there, Egon."

"Very well," the physicist sighed, unable to object to such a reasonable plan. "But let's make it a quick meal, gentlemen."

"Is there any other kind for us?" Winston muttered as he pulled out of the parking lot and joined the stream of traffic leaving the airport.

Jonathan picked up the telephone on his desk as it rang, glancing as he did so at Benny, who was lounging in the recliner with a sheaf of notes spread across his lap. "Hello? Yes, this is Dr. MacKensie ... No, it hasn't been sighted again, Dr. Spengler. Yes, Benedek and I are waiting for you. My office is number 301 in the Physical Sciences Building. Oh, take your time, please. Yes, all right." He hung up and reported to Benny, "The Ghostbusters are in town. They're going to get a little dinner before coming over to the campus."

The journalist gave a little start and opened his eyes. "That's great, Jack."

"Hmph." Jonathan returned to the papers spread before him, an amused smile tugging at his lips.

Benny glanced at the darkness beyond the window, then checked his wristwatch. "Quarter after eight. Guess we're the only ones left in the building, huh, Jonny?"

"I imagine so. Have you reached any conclusions about these reports yet, Benedek?"

A loud crash prevented Benny from answering, and both men exchanged startled glances. Each stood up and turned toward the office doorway, listening for additional clues to the intruder's location. "Perhaps it's one of the cleaning crew," Jonathan whispered.

"We'd better go check it out, pard," Benny whispered back.

"But it could be a burglar! I'll call security —"

"Noisiest burglar I've ever heard," the reporter interrupted. "Might be Rama, back for a return engagement. Maybe you'd better stay here, after all ..."

"Benedek!" Jonathan called in warning as the reporter eased open the office door and peered warily into the corridor. He followed the

headstrong journalist, joining him in time to see the hovering figure of *Ramapithecus* raise its fist and smash another of the overhead lights out, then turn a fierce gaze on them.

"Gotcha!" Benny crowed, snapping a photograph of the apparition.

It roared as his camera's flash went off, and dove straight for him. Jonathan pulled his friend back into the office and slammed the door shut against the creature's attack. The door shivered against their backs, and the two men exchanged panicked looks.

Then, abruptly, the roars of the apeman ceased and there were no more blows to the door.

"Is it gone?" Jonathan mouthed.

Benny raised an eyebrow and eased the door open a crack. The corridor was deserted, save for the shards of glass on the floor. The door to Jonathan's office bore scratch marks as well.

"I feel ill," Jonathan said. "This — this is not possible, Benedek! It's not rational, or — or normal ..."

"It's paranormal, Jack." Benny ran his fingers down one of the grooves on the doorjamb. "But why you, I wonder? Why is it focused on you?"

"Why not? Lately I seem to be a magnet for all sorts of bizarreness," Jonathan complained, giving Benny a pointed look which the journalist ignored. Benny was busy taking photos of the damage.

"Ya know, maybe it's a female Rama," Benny suggested, turning around to snap a picture of a protesting Jonathan with his mouth open. "You do have a way with the ladies, Don Juan."

"It is not a female," Jonathan denied firmly, then paused and looked uncertain.

Benny grinned and chuckled, taking another snapshot of the professor. "Maybe Rama swings both ways."

"Benedek!"

"Okay, okay, keep your buttoned-down shirt on, pal. We have to consider all the angles, you know. Spengler is gonna look at all the

possibilities — he's a real stickler for the 'scientific'."

"That's why he spends his life chasing ghosts," Jonathan muttered.

"Ah, but he does it scientifically," Benny countered with a wide grin.

"What's that?" Jonathan squeaked, gripping Benny's arm and pulling him back into the office.

"I dunno. Let's check it out."

"No! Benedek — Benedek! Come back here," Jonathan demanded, his voice full of panic as the journalist flung the door open and bounded out into the corridor. "Benedek!" Jonathan cast a frantic glance around his office, hoping to find something he could use as a weapon. Benny's shout made him freeze, and he forgot all about caution as he ran down the corridor to Benny's aid.

"Whoa! Get a load of this, Jon-Boy! He ripped the door right off the hinges!" Benny exclaimed as Jonathan skidded to a halt, crashing against the journalist's slight figure. "With a little practice on that slide you could give Johnny Bench a run for his money."

"I'm so pleased. Good lord!"

"Yeah, impressive, huh? For a nonexistent figment of your imagination, he's pretty strong." Benny bent over the remains of the door, glass crunching under his Nikes. "Jack."

"What?"

"Blood."

Jonathan blinked, then squatted down to inspect the piece of glass Benny held up. "Still wet."

"It must be from ol' Rama," Benny observed, meeting Jonathan's troubled gaze.

"Impossible," Jonathan grumbled. "It's not real!"

"Try telling *him* that, pal. There's a trail."

"A trail? Oh, no! We're waiting for the Ghostbusters," Jonathan said, reading the enthusiasm in Benny's bright blue eyes. "They are

the professionals, after all. This — this goes beyond anything we've encountered."

"Jack, there's an injured monster on the loose," Benny objected, standing up. "He's gonna be even more of a danger — injured and mad."

Jonathan rubbed his forehead, then nodded. "All those students ..."

"Bingo, J.J. Let's go."

"But — what if we find it?"

"I guess we lead him back here and hope the guys are here by then," Benny said with a shrug. "Sure hope they didn't stop for a full-course meal."

The Ghostbusters slowed as they approached the entrance to the Physical Sciences building. The double glass doors had been shattered, and hung half-off their hinges.

"Senior Prank?" Peter quipped, even as he unshipped his thrower.

"Gee, I hope we're not too late," Ray worried, exchanging glances with Winston.

"This looks extraordinarily bad," Egon commented, pulling a PKE meter from his jumpsuit's pocket. The device began to blink and beep, and its antennae rose from a folded position until they were horizontal. "Hm. Only residual readings. But this damage was caused by a paranormal source."

"You see, Peter? Benny was telling the truth after all," Ray said, hardly able to conceal his delight at the prospect of an unusual bust.

"We'd better see if we can find him and the professor," Peter said, boots crunching glass shards underfoot as he walked toward the lobby elevator.

A check of MacKensie's office revealed more damage, but no trace of the anthropologist or Benedek. Peter ran his fingers along the deep scratches in the office door and Egon scanned it with the PKE meter.

"More residual readings," Egon announced, looking up from the meter. "I suggest we return to the lobby."

"Whatever you say, big guy," Peter agreed with a shrug, still holding his thrower. He felt safer, more in control somehow, so long as he was armed and ready.

The four returned to the lobby and engaged in a more thorough search for clues.

"Egon!"

The physicist turned from his inspection of the shattered doors, instantly alerted by the alarm in Stantz's voice. "What is it, Ray?"

Ray held out a shard of glass, and Egon bent over his hand to examine it.

"What is it?" Peter demanded, coming up beside Egon to see what Ray had found.

"Blood," Ray whispered, his voice filled with concern.

"Blood?" Peter squeaked, backing up a step.

"Hmm. It's giving off very strong PKE readings," Egon observed, aiming the meter at the shard. "I would theorize it was left behind by the creature we're here to contain."

"It? Ghosts don't bleed, Egon!"

"Quite true, Peter. Most unusual." Egon pushed his glasses back in place, and looked at the horrified psychologist.

"There's more," Winston added, pointing to the floor. "Looks like it left a trail."

"And no doubt Dr. MacKensie and Benedek have followed it," Egon said, aiming his PKE meter at the blood trail and starting off.

"Hold it, big guy! Where are you going?" Peter grabbed Egon by the arm, halting the tall blond.

"After the others, of course."

"Of course," Peter repeated dryly. "Of course you're just going after some creature that may have killed people!"

"Well, we have to find it and stop it before it does any more harm," Ray pointed out, quite prepared to follow Egon.

"Ray —"

"Heads up, guys," Winston called, spying a figure coming across the darkened campus. They all turned, throwers at the ready.

"It's me! Don't shoot!"

Peter lowered his thrower. "It's just Benedek."

"But where's Dr. MacKensie?" Ray wondered as Benny staggered up to them.

"It's — it's got Jack! I couldn't stop it ... figured I'd better come for help," the journalist gasped, sagging to his knees as Winston and Ray reached out to catch him by the arms.

"Show us the way, Benny," Peter requested, his tone gentle and devoid of any suspicion. "Or are you up to it? Maybe you'd better stay here —"

Benedek shook his head and turned back the way he'd come, leading them across the campus, past the fountain in the quadrangle and toward the trees marking the borders of the campus property. "It's my fault," he explained as they hurried along. "I got it mad when I took its picture, and it went on a rampage. Jack wanted to wait for you guys, but I told him we had to stop it before it hurt anybody ... We found it in the greenbelt ..." He slowed, pointing. "In there. Jonny saw it sneaking up on me and knocked me down, so it grabbed him instead."

"Anything on the PKE, Egon?"

"No, Peter —" the physicist began, pausing as the device beeped rapidly. "It's a Class Eight — directly ahead!"

"Fan out, guys," Winston ordered, as he and Peter advanced into the woods.

"Stay back, Benny," Ray urged, as he and Egon followed their comrades, throwers at the ready.

Benedek obeyed, frustrated, but aware that he couldn't rush forward to Jonathan's rescue now without getting in the Ghostbusters' way. He took a deep breath and shouted, "Jack!"

There was no reply, and Benny sank to the ground, his head in his hands. "It's my fault he got you, Jack," he said softly. A fresh wave of

resolve swept over him, and he raised his head. "I'll save ya, buds," he promised, scrambling to his feet and running across the campus as fast as his Nikes would take him.

Jonathan moaned and clutched his temples, unable to remember the last time someone had played "The Anvil Chorus" in his head. Surely not since the party which had followed the awarding of his PhD, although lately he'd had some beauties, thanks to Benedek.

Benedek.

Jonathan sat up straight and looked around. "Benedek?" he called softly. "Benny?" he tried a little louder, panic welling.

There was no sign of the journalist. In fact, there was no sign of anyone, Jonathan realized as he shaded his eyes with one hand to look across the Savannah.

Savannah?

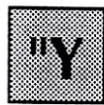
Jonathan blinked and looked across the landscape again. It definitely resembled the African Savannah, and the dry hot air *felt* like Africa.

"I am not going to panic," he muttered to himself, flopping back and draping his forearm over his eyes. "This is just a bad dream, no doubt induced by — by that pizza Benny ordered. I begged for plain cheese, but he loaded it down with bizarre things. That's it, it's just the pizza."

But the hot breeze stirring against his cheek felt real, and he'd long ago lost the ability for vivid dreams. It was time to admit he was no longer on the campus of the Georgetown Institute of Science. Somehow he'd been transported to the African Savannah ... and he was alone.

"Benedek will show up in a minute; he always does," Jonathan murmured in a feeble attempt to reassure himself. "This has to be some twisted idea of a joke that he cooked up — probably slipped me one of Theo's potions and it's induced this hallucination. It'll wear off any minute and I'll wake up. Please let it be one of Benedek's jokes."

He knew it really wasn't one of Benny's pranks, but it was the only hope he had to cling to for the moment.



o, Egon! Will this help?" Benny shouted, racing up to the blond Ghostbuster and waving a long roll of paper. "Can you get any clues from this?"

"I don't know, Benny," Egon answered solemnly, turning his attention to the shorter man. "It depends on what it is."

"It's the chart," Benny informed him, starting to unroll it. "You know, the one Rama's picture was on before he decided to crash Jack's party."

"The chart?" Ray echoed, coming over to join them.

"Yeah, the one Jonny was using in his lecture," Benny affirmed, snapping it out.

"There is a high PKE residue," Egon announced, aiming the PKE meter at the chart.

"But what caused it?" Ray wanted to know, studying the meter as he peered over Egon's arm.

"I haven't a clue — yet," Egon replied, slowly turning in a circle while his gaze was fastened on the meter.

"It looks like a perfectly ordinary hunk of paper," Ray observed, fingering the chart Benny still held.

"Yes, it is," Egon agreed. "Someone put a spell on it."

"A spell? Uh-oh," Benny said, rolling up the chart.

"But who would put a spell on something Dr. MacKensie would be using? And why?"

"Perhaps Benny can answer that question, Raymond."

"Me?"

"Has Dr. MacKensie angered any demons or sorcerers?"

"Jon-Boy? Nah, everybody likes the Crown Prince of Charm," Benny quipped with a wave of the chart.

"Hmm. Didn't you say Dr. MacKensie pushed you out of the way and then he disappeared?" Egon asked, giving Benny his scrutinizing stare.

"Egon, are you saying that *Benny* was the target?"

"It's only a theory, Ray."

"But probably spot-on, Dr. E. You'll find my name on quite a few hit lists," Benny admitted, shrugging his shoulders. "Guess someone has done their homework and knew J.J. would call me in at the first sign of weird. We've got to find a way to haul Jonny back to the land of academia. Maybe we can work a deal, exchange me for the professor."

"That would only be possible if we could identify the antagonist."

Benny took a deep breath and puffed out his cheeks as he considered. Before he could answer, Winston came running up, proton rifle in hand.

"Did Pete come back this way?"

"No, we haven't seen him," Ray said, turning to look at Zeddemore. "He was with you —"

"Was is the key word, homeboy," Winston pointed out, trying to catch his breath. "We split up, and I heard a yell but I couldn't find Peter."

"I've got a bad feeling about this, gentleman."

"Maybe Pete found a dimensional doorway or something really great," Benny suggested with a trace of his normal enthusiasm.

"Or maybe whatever snatched Dr. MacKensie has captured Peter."

"I hate it when you think of things like that, Egon," Winston complained.

"We must return to the location where you last saw Peter, and see if we can discover a trail," Egon outlined, frowning at the PKE meter. "I'm getting a faint reading in that direction." He pointed to his right, and Winston nodded.

"That's where we were, m'man."

"Egon, what's wrong?" Ray asked, noticing the way the physicist's frown deepened.

"It would appear that now we're dealing with a Class 9, to judge from these residual readings."

"Wow! A Class 9?"

"I thought you said it was a Class 8," Winston said, frowning at Egon.

"It was, but now the reading is higher. Most unusual."

"It changed? How is that possible?" Ray wanted to know.

"I don't know." Egon sounded disgusted with himself for failing to have the information. "We could be dealing with more than one entity."

"More than one? You mean Jack could be in the clutches of a ghost gang?"

"And what about Peter? Is he with Dr. MacKensie?" Ray worried.

"I don't have the answers, gentlemen," Egon snapped, the sharpness of his tone directed more at himself than at his companions. The physicist was clearly frustrated by his inability to supply the requested information.

"And standing around here jawing isn't going to help us find Peter," Winston added grimly, hefting his proton rifle.

"Well, let's retrace Pete's steps," Benny advised, sticking the rolled up chart in his back pocket, one end rising a few inches above his head.

"I'll recalibrate the PKE meter for Peter's biorhythms," Egon offered, making some adjustments on the meter. Frowning, he stared at the tiny monitor and made another adjustment, finally shaking the meter.

"What's wrong, Egon?" Ray asked, standing next to the physicist and peering at the PKE meter. Sucking in a deep breath, Ray looked up to meet Winston's and Benny's curious gazes. "It — it isn't registering Peter at all," he said slowly, a starkness in his brown eyes.

"Maybe he's just out of range," Winston suggested hopefully.

"Or maybe the demons or whatever the heck they are are masking his life signs," Benny added, trying to bolster their spirits.

"Perhaps," Egon agreed reluctantly, still fiddling with the meter. "Show us where you last saw Peter, Winston."

The attractive black man nodded and motioned for them to follow him. "Right about here we decided to split up," he said, pointing with his thrower. "Pete went that way ..."

"Then so do we," Egon intoned, his jaw set.

"Ya know, if he isn't registering on the doo-hickey, maybe he did go through a dimensional doorway," Benny said cheerfully, bumping into the tall blond when Egon abruptly halted. "Whoa, give a hand signal or something —" Benny broke off, realizing the three Ghostbusters were staring at the ground. "What gives?"

"It's — it's Peter's proton pack," Ray whispered, kneeling down beside the pack. "He wouldn't abandon his pack, Egon. Not while we're on a bust, anyway."

"It's still got a full charge," Winston added, squatting across from Ray to inspect the pack.

"Gentlemen, we have a problem," Egon announced solemnly.

"Couldn't have said it better, m'man," Winston agreed, standing up.

Ray pulled a PKE meter from his own pocket and scanned the area. "Very high readings, Egon. Whatever we're after was here, and probably has Peter."

"Let's just hope he's still in one piece," Winston said grimly, picking up the pack.

"I'll carry it," Benny offered, holding out his hands.

The three Ghostbusters exchanged looks. "That isn't a good idea, Mr. Benedek. We've been trained to handle the nuclear accelerator," Egon began.

"Hey, I'm not gonna use it," Benny protested with an innocent grin. "But you guys are already loaded down and I'm not. It just makes sense to let me play pack mule — right?"

Egon's own blue eyes narrowed as he studied Benny's apparently guileless ones. "This isn't a game — lives are at stake —"

"Yeah, and one of 'em belongs to my pal."

After considering for a moment, Egon nodded and motioned for Winston to help Benny put on the pack. "Don't make me regret this decision, Mr. Benedek."

Benny paused in buckling the waist strap and he met Egon's gaze. The underlying threat in the physicist's tone spoke volumes, and Benny nodded. "Cross my heart, Big E."

"Big E?" Ray mouthed silently at Winston who raised his eyebrows in response.

"Ray, I shall keep this meter attuned for Peter's biorhythms," Egon informed him, ignoring Benny's moniker in the same way that Jonathan had learned to do. "We will use yours —"

"Egon! There — there does seem to be a doorway or something!" Ray exclaimed excitedly, waving the beeping meter around. "Extremely high readings!" He pointed the meter at what appeared to be empty space, and Egon aimed his own meter.

"Gentlemen, Peter is on the other side."

"Then why are we standing around here?" Winston demanded, stepping forward and disappearing.

"This is grrreat!" Benny declared, following.

Ray and Egon looked at each other, and then moved in synchronization, vanishing as they entered the invisible doorway.

Peter landed with a noisy thud, sprawling as the breath was knocked from his lungs. His vision swam and bells rang in his ears.

"You're not Benedek!"

The announcement made Peter wince, and he struggled to sit up. A pair of human-feeling hands assisted, and one hand remained bracingly against his back. "Thank God for small favors," Peter muttered, rubbing his forehead.

"Who are you?" his companion asked, and Peter blinked until his eyes focused on a pair of very worried brown eyes.

"Dr. Peter Venkman, Ghostbuster Extraordinaire."

"Ghostbuster? Where are the others?"

"That, my friend, is a very good question. An excellent question, as a matter of fact," Peter said, looking around. "And I have an even better one: where are we? And how did we get here?"

"That's two questions," the sandy-haired man pointed out. He squinted at the horizon, and added critically, "*Looks* a bit like Africa, though I've never seen the sky quite this shade of yellow."

Peter looked up and blinked. The sky was yellow. Not a pale, dusty yellow, but bright, lemony yellow. He met the stranger's gaze and raised a questioning eyebrow.

"Patently impossible, of course. It must be an illusion. As for your second question — I haven't the foggiest idea."

Peter tilted his head and studied the man. His accent was British, but softened as if influenced by several years in the company of Americans. "You expected to see Benedek — Dr. MacKensie, I presume?"

"Yes, I am," the anthropologist said, smiling and offering his hand. "Perhaps you'd better call me Jonathan, since we seem to be stuck in the same illusion together." He looked hopeful. "It is just all some sort of an hallucination, isn't it?"

"Wish it was, pal," Peter agreed as he shook Jonathan's hand, then rubbed the back of his head, wincing. "But from what I saw back on the other side, I'd say we've passed through a dimensional doorway. Look, did you hike any distance from the place where you, uh, dropped in?"

Jonathan shook his head, puzzled.

The Ghostbuster looked relieved. "Good, then all we'll have to do is stay put until Egon and the guys come through to rescue us."

The thought of rescue was obviously infinitely cheering, but Jonathan seemed intent on finding the flaw in the plan. "What if they're not able to come immediately? I mean, it'll be nightfall in a matter of hours, and there may be wild animals out here ... And what if there are more of those Ramapithecus creatures? The one I encountered wasn't particularly friendly —"

Peter Venkman grinned. "Don't worry, Professor. If the hairy apes come around, I'll just give 'em a taste of Old Betsey here and —" He reached over his shoulder, then froze for a moment. "She's gone!"

"I beg your pardon?" Jonathan's jaw dropped open in astonishment as Peter began turning in comic circles, trying to see his own back, rather like a dog chasing its own tail. "Who's gone, Dr. Venkman?"

Peter acknowledged defeat, his shoulders slumping. "My proton pack's gone," he told Jonathan. "We're defenseless."

"Proton pack? Is that some sort of weapon?"

"Best dang weapon there is, pardner," Peter drawled in his John Wayne impersonation. At Jonathan's blank look, he continued, "Our proton packs and ghost traps are what we use to capture and contain ghosts."

"But — I don't think we're dealing with ghosts," Jonathan pointed out, pausing over the word "ghosts." "After all, there are no such things —"

"Try telling Egon and Ray that, pal. Our containment unit is filling up to the point of overload," Peter informed him.

"With ghosts? I don't believe in —"

"I think you will before we're out of this mess," Peter suggested, clapping a hand on Jonathan's shoulder. "How can you hang around with Edgar Benedek and not believe?"

"I don't 'hang around' with Benedek, exactly. And I believe very little of what he spouts," Jonathan

said with a disdainful sniff. "Science and logic can explain everything."

"I didn't always believe either, pal, but I've been educated. Egon and Ray are certainly more scientific than Benny, and Spengs has several degrees."

"Yes, I've read some of Dr. Spengler's papers, and I find it hard to believe such a brilliant man even entertains the notion that ghosts and demons exist."

Peter folded his arms across his chest and looked at a point just past Jonathan. "Oh yeah? Then what's that?"

Jonathan whirled around and followed Peter's gaze. "It's - it's -"

"It ain't Santa Claus, pal! But then, you probably don't believe in him, either," Peter declared, lowering his arms and looking around for a weapon. "Don't tell Ray Santa doesn't exist."

"How can we be facing a nonexistent, prehistoric man?" Jonathan muttered, staring at the approaching Ramapithecus loping toward them.

"Figure it out later, buddy," Peter said, grabbing the professor's arm and pulling him behind a scraggly thornbush. "Hey, Jonathan, how good are you at lobbing rocks?" He indicated a small pile of stones he'd managed to gather. "If he gets too close, we're going to have to try to scare him off."

"This can't be happening," Jonathan mumbled, still standing up and staring across the plain.

Peter clutched the professor by the arm, hauling him down behind the bush. "You'd better wake up and smell the coffee, Jack, because we are definitely in trouble."

Jonathan blinked and stared at Peter, then shook his head. For just a second, he'd heard Benedek's voice. "I won't argue *that* point with you, Dr. Venkman," he admitted quietly.

"Glad to hear it," Peter grumbled, secretly wondering if the professor had some sort of a mental problem. He'd encountered enough absent-minded academic types during his college days to know the cliché had a basis in fact. "All right, help me get some more ammo together -"

Jonathan picked up one of the stones and gave it a thoughtful look. "This isn't going to work, Venkman. Primates aren't like other animals - a single lion or wolf can be driven off by this method, but chimps or baboons are more likely to attack if provoked."

Peter paused and considered that piece of information. "So whaddya suggest we do - just sit here and hope we're invisible?"

"Yes, actually." The anthropologist tested the wind, then nodded. "We're downwind. If we don't move, he may not see us."

"May not?" Peter stared at him, then shrugged. "Something tells me I'm not gonna like the odds on that, but we'll try it your way, Marlon Perkins."

Jonathan's brows drew down, then he gestured for silence.

The Ramapithecus slackened its pace as it drew even with the patch of brush they were hiding behind. It stopped, its head up, sniffing the wind for long minutes that seemed to last forever. Then, abruptly, it loped off in the opposite direction.

"I don't believe it," Peter declared softly. "That was a good call, Professor!"

"Thank you," Jonathan said, as he lost the battle to suppress a sneeze. "Allergies," he explained, fumbling for his handkerchief. "Animal hair - sets them off."

"I get killer hayfever attacks, myself," Peter said sympathetically.

"Animal hair ..." Jonathan repeated, looking thoughtful. "If in fact Ramapithecus is Man's ancestor, his hair should be more human than animal. But I'm sneezing, so it's more animal. Perhaps it's not as closely related to Man as we've surmised."

"I haven't surmised anything," Peter commented, peering over the bush to make sure the creature was gone. "I've never heard of Ramawhosis until your phone call, although Egon knew all about it."

"Ramapithecus," Jonathan corrected automatically, apparently used to Benny's slaughtering of the name.

"Whatever." Peter shrugged and stood up, dusting off the seat of his jumpsuit. "What now, O Great Leader? This seems to be more your turf than mine."

Jonathan ran a hand through his hair. "We should find shelter, food and water. We don't know how long we're going to be here – wherever *here* is. And I'm not sure it's wise to count on your friends finding us; we should try and figure out a way out of this place."

"It's the *only* thing you can count on, pal. Egon, Ray and Winston won't rest until they find me, and if they find *me*, then they find *you* – right?"

Giving careful consideration to Peter's logic, Jonathan finally nodded. "Yes, well, I suppose that's true enough. But we had best make certain we're alive for them to find. There is serious danger from exposure to the sun and dehydration in this climate."

Peter ran his forearm along his forehead, wiping sweat onto the sleeve of his jumpsuit. "It *is* hotter than Hades, isn't it?"

Jonathan removed his suit jacket and folded it, carefully draping it over his arm. "Just be glad it's winter."

"Yeah? How do you figure that?"

Smiling, Jonathan pointed to the thornbrush. "The native vegetation is green – that means we've arrived during the rainy season."

"Looks pretty dry to me."

Jonathan shrugged and shaded his eyes as he surveyed the landscape. After a moment, he pointed to a clump of scraggly trees about a mile away. "We'll have more shade over there, and we can use the trees to sleep in if we must."

"Must we? I don't care for heights much," Peter admitted. "What's wrong with sleeping on the ground, anyway?"

"Wild animals," the anthropologist advised as he bent down and picked up a stone from the heap Peter had gathered. "Let's use these to make a marker, so we can find our way back to this spot, if it really is as important as you say."

"Good idea," the Ghostbuster agreed, and promptly knelt to assist him in building a small cairn, with a crude arrow pointing in the direction of the trees. "For the guys," he added, and Jonathan nodded in approval.

The pair started walking across the plain, squinting against the bright sunlight.

"So Jonathan, how did you get hooked up with Benny?" Peter asked, hoping to distract himself from the fact he was hot and getting thirsty.

"As Benedek might say, 'karma'," Jonathan replied with a wry smile. "Dr. Moorhouse sent me to Fartham, California to investigate a supposedly haunted house and Benedek was investigating the same case."

"Bad timing, huh?" Peter sympathized. "Wrong place at the wrong time."

"Well, actually Benedek was quite – somewhat – helpful in solving the mystery," Jonathan admitted, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket and mopping his forehead. "His enthusiasm can be overwhelming, but he does know how to ferret out information. I will admit some of his friends are, well, bizarre, but they are harmless." Realizing he was talking to one of Benedek's many friends, he paused and looked embarrassed. "Of course I don't mean that you are bizarre, but he has introduced me to some unbelievable personalities."

"Hey, pal, how many people do you know who risk their lives busting ghosts? I'd say that could qualify for bizarre," Peter suggested, patting his pockets for a handkerchief. "Egon, Ray and I have spent years defending ourselves and our profession. Winston has been with us a short time but he's had his share of put-downs, including his own father. Egon's old man has never forgiven him for pursuing ghostbusting instead of working at Spengler Labs. If our own families can't understand us, how can we expect total strangers to accept us? Fortunately we've had some pretty spectacular busts which have validated our profession."

"You really believe you've captured ghosts?" Jonathan tied his handkerchief around his head, providing slight protection from the sun.

"You're even more skeptical than I was, pal. Even though I had a degree in parapsychology, I didn't

believe in ghosts until Egon and Ray confronted one. They dragged me over to the library and the rest, as they say, is history. They put their scientific heads together and developed the proton packs and ghost traps, and we were in business."

"The ghostbusting business."

"You bet," Peter agreed cheerfully. "Hey, pal, somebody's got to do it and it may as well be us. No one does it as well as the Ghostbusters."

"It seems like a rather elaborate scam."

"Scam? Hey, buddy, my pop runs scams; Benedek runs scams but we are legit!"

"My apologies," Jonathan said hastily, holding up a hand as if to ward off blows. "I just meant it *could* be a scam, charging people money to rid them of ghosts, when ghosts don't exist. Of course, if they believe they've been freed of troubling ghosts, then —"

"We bust ghosts," Peter announced loudly, enunciating each word. "Read my lips, MacKensie: Ghosts exist and we put the suckers away. We make the world a safer, quieter place and because we have expenses, we charge fees. It's a legitimate business."

Jonathan was staring at him, mouth agape. "I — see," he said at last. "Yes, of course it is. I'm sorry, Dr. Venkman."

Peter gave him a suspicious look, then nodded in acknowledgement.

They continued walking in silence for some distance, and finally Jonathan cleared his throat and ventured, "You don't seem very fond of Benedek, considering the way he's talked about you."

"Yeah, I can just imagine," Peter sneered. "What'd he say, anyway?"

"That you've been friends a long time."

"Is that what he calls it?"

Jonathan frowned. "Don't you?"

Peter shrugged. "You know Benny. He'll do anything for a story — even make the stuff up."

"That's a bit harsh, I think." Jonathan met the Ghostbuster's astonished gaze, and stammered, "Well, I know he tends to be a bit, er, flamboyant at times, but since I've known him he's been scrupulously truthful in recording our — cases. And I've never known him to deliberately set out to deceive anyone."

"Then you really don't know him, do you?"

"I believe I know him as well as he lets anyone know him," Jonathan answered quietly. "He spins wild stories and is quite colorful, and he has a freedom of spirit that I envy. Benedek hides a great deal of pain behind the jester's façade of his. His father was a disappointment, he lost his fiancée in a plane crash, and he has erected a considerable wall around his heart. It's safer than caring."

"He told you all that, did he?" Peter jeered.

"No. In fact, he's gone to extremes to hide it. But every once in a while there are cracks in his shielding, and I am allowed a glimpse of the real man. Most people probably ignore these glimpses or choose to believe it's just another part of Benny's scamming ways. Call me old-fashioned or naive, but I prefer to believe everyone has a core of goodness, even Benedek."

"Now you sound like Ray," Peter commented with a self-deprecating laugh. "Well, Ray found the goodness in me, so I guess it's possible Benny has a hidden heart."

"Anything is possible."

There was an underlying chastisement in the professor's tone that made Peter squirm, and he didn't like it. "Well, I've known the guy a lot longer —"

"But apparently not as well."

"How much further do we have to walk?" Peter asked, trying to change the subject. "We don't want to go too far or the guys will have trouble finding us."

"Until we can find some shelter. Since this is winter, we need to find higher ground or at least some trees," Jonathan told him, pausing to remove his shoe and shake out a tiny rock.

"Higher ground?"

"Flash flooding is a possibility," Jonathan said, wobbling on one foot as he tried to replace his shoe. Peter caught him by the arm to steady him and Jonathan mumbled his thanks.

"Flooding? In the desert?"

"Sudden rain squalls can result in flash flooding because the ground is so parched it can't absorb the water quickly enough. One time I was here on a dig and our camp turned into an island," Jonathan recalled. "The water went down fairly quickly, but until it did we were stranded. Fortunately Dr. Johanson chose a campsite that was on high ground or we would have been washed away."

Peter found this hard to believe, but he decided that Jonathan was sincere. After all, he was the one with experience ... "So you've been here before?"

"Not *here* exactly, but certainly to Africa. I'm not quite sure where we are now, but it resembles Africa's Great Rift Valley."

"I wonder why? I mean, I've been to the Netherworld before, and it didn't look like this," Peter said thoughtfully as they started off again.

"The — Netherworld?"

"Yeah, it's a lousy place to visit, and you sure wouldn't want to live there," Peter informed his companion. "It's a sort of limbo, next door to our dimension, chock-full of lost souls and nether-entities. The guys and I went across once to bring Egon back after he destabilized that time ..."

"And you think we're in this Netherworld now?" Jonathan asked.

Peter cocked his head to one side and lifted an eyebrow. "I'm open to better suggestions, pal. What do you remember about getting here?"

Jonathan's brows knitted as he considered the question. "Well, the, er, Ramapithecus had destroyed the glass doors, and Benedek insisted we follow it across the campus. We found it and it charged on us. Benedek was directly in its path, and I tackled him to get him out of the way, and

the creature seized my arm — there was a bright flash of light, and I was here." He glanced back at the cairn of stones they had left behind, and added, "Well, over there, actually."

"Yeah, sounds like a dimensional doorway to me," Peter said, trying to sound as authoritative as Egon.

"If it's a doorway, can't we just go back through?"

"It doesn't work that way," Peter snapped irritably. "And before you ask, I don't *know* why — you'd have to ask Egon. We don't know if we'd end up back in our world or another part of the Netherworld. You want to take the chance?"

"No, no of course not," Jonathan stammered. "But isn't there something we can do besides wait to be rescued? I'm not entirely confident your friends will find us. What if the doorway they find doesn't lead them here?"

"You're a real optimist, aren't you? Egon will find us. I just want to know what you did to warrant a trip to this place."

"I've been wondering the same thing, myself. My life was so quiet, so normal until Dr. Moorhouse sprang her little 'surprise' on me," Jonathan related with a heartfelt sigh. "I just wanted a grant to pursue my research on Ramapithecus, but she insisted I do a little project for her first, and I haven't had a moment's peace since. And if she doesn't find some bizarre phenomenon for me to investigate, Benedek comes along with a wild idea and the next thing I know I'm halfway across the country looking for ghosts or aliens or some other crazy thing."

"Sounds like a skeptic's nightmare," Peter commented.

"Yes, it is," Jonathan agreed. "Especially since most of the phenomena we've investigated have had perfectly logical explanations ..." He hesitated, loosening his tie a little, and added reluctantly, "I'll admit I haven't quite worked out every single detail yet —"

"Like the flying apeman who nabbed you?" Peter asked mischievously.

Jonathan's mouth opened and closed before he replied, "Yes, well, er, I'm as much in the dark about why I'm here as you are."

"Maybe not," the Ghostbuster suggested, rubbing his chin. "Maybe you're here by mistake. Ramapithecus was after Benny, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps," Jonathan answered cautiously. "But — why? Benedek doesn't know anything about anthropology."

"But the first thing you did was call in Benny," Peter pointed out. "Whoever is the mastermind behind this knows the connection between you guys. By appearing to come after you, Benny was off-guard and would have been snatched if you hadn't interfered."

"So I'm here by mistake," Jonathan mused. "It wanted Benedek but got me instead. But why you?"

"Wrong place at the wrong time, I guess. I fell through the doorway," Peter said with a shrug.

Jonathan looked dubious, but held his peace until they had reached the fringe of trees. Both men collapsed in the shade of a particularly tall tree, grateful for the respite.

"I never want to move again," Peter declared, wiping his face with a bright red handkerchief.

Jonathan sighed. "Maybe it won't hurt if we just rest a few minutes. But I really think it would be best if we try to find —"

A rumbling snore interrupted him, and Jonathan realized that Peter Venkman was sound asleep. He sighed deeply. "I'll keep watch," he announced needlessly, settling his spine against the tree trunk and folding his arms across his chest. Peter snuffled in his sleep and Jonathan shook his head. Venkman reminded him of someone ...

Winston grunted softly as his boots impacted solid ground, the jolt moving up his bent knees. He squinted at the grayish-green sky overhead, and then looked across the rocky landscape before him. "Looks like we made it, guys," he commented, turning his head to look at the others.

"Sure looks like the Netherworld," Ray agreed.

"Indeed," Egon said. "Mr. Benedek, are you all right?"

There was no reply. The Ghostbusters scanned the immediate vicinity before looking at each other with realization: Benedek was missing.

"Uh-oh," Ray said, looking at Egon. "How could we have lost him?"

"Yeah, man, he was right behind me — wasn't he?" Winston demanded, swinging around to survey their surroundings.

"You were point man, and Egon and I brought up the rear," Ray assured him. "Benny had to be between us ..."

"Gentlemen, this does not look promising," Egon intoned in his rumbling voice. "Whoever — or whatever — we're after is systemically separating us. I now doubt that Dr. MacKensie and Peter are together, and our antagonist apparently believes in the adage there is safety in numbers so he is paring down our number. We must try and remain together."

"But how?"

"Good question, Raymond."

Winston was standing with his back to the others, his rifle at the ready and his gaze alert for trouble. "Egon, see if you can get a fix on Peter's readings now."

The physicist nodded and examined his PKE meter, his brows knitted thoughtfully. After a few moments, he raised his head and pushed his glasses back up onto the bridge of his nose. "According to this, Peter should be approximately 152.3 meters away, in that direction." He pointed northeasterly, across the rubble-strewn landscape.

Ray brightened at the news. "Well, that's good! We'll just go find him —" He started off, jerking to a stop as Winston grabbed his arm.

"Hang on, homeboy. We've gotta make sure we don't get split up. It'd be better if we had some spare rope to tie ourselves together, but since we don't, we need to plan our moves. Egon, you'd better lead the way. Ray, stay right behind him, and I'll be the rearguard."

"Very sensible, Winston," Egon commended. "Ray, please check your PKE meter for the readings of

this doorway, and mark them, so we can find our way back to it once we've located Peter."

"Got 'em," Ray said after a few minutes. He pocketed the meter and pulled his proton-rifle, readying it for action.

The three Ghostbusters set off in single-file, stepping carefully across the uneven terrain stretching before them.



hoa! Talk about your sudden travel plans," Benny announced, staggering slightly as his feet touched concrete.

Grinning, he looked around for the Ghostbusters and his smile slipped a little when he realized they were nowhere to be seen. "Yo, Egon? Ray? Winston? Come out come out, wherever you are! Olly Olly outs in free," he sang out, slowly spinning around. "C'mon, guys, we're a little pressed for time if we're gonna find Jack and Peter."

The sidewalk became crowded with passersby, and Benny found himself being jostled. "Give a guy a little breathing space, willya?" he muttered, pushing back. "Where'd you all come from, anyway?" No one bothered to reply, and it was as if Benny was invisible. "Whoa! Check it out," he said, whistling in surprise. "How'd I get here?"

"Here" was a crowded New Orleans street which looked hauntingly familiar. He'd been here before ...

"Pete! Yo, V-man, it's me —" Benny broke off, bright blue eyes growing wide as he watched Peter Venkman scuffling along the confetti-strewn street. It wasn't so much the sight of Peter which took Benny by surprise but it was the man running up to the Ghostbuster. "I always thought I was better looking," he mused as Edgar Benedek, journalist extraordinaire flung an arm around Peter Venkman's shoulder.

"What do you want, Benny?" the Ghostbuster growled.

"Yeah, it's great to see you, too," Benny's doppelganger greeted cheerfully. "Should have known Dr. V would show up for Mardi Gras in the Big Easy. Was that some parade or what?!"

"Fine," Peter said with a shrug, "what I could see of it from Ecto's window." He sighed deeply and

kicked at an abandoned whiskey bottle, sending it rolling down the sidewalk. "Nobody told me Mardi Gras was over! Egon probably knew it and let me come anyway, just to make a point."

The watching Benny perked up his ears at this. "Talk about *deja vu*! I've heard this before ..." About a year ago, in fact, the spring before he'd met Jonathan. He moved closer to the pair, his attention on their conversation.

"That's the breaks, pal," Benny's alter-ego said (he decided to think of him as Edgar, just for his sanity's sake). "But that doesn't mean you and I can't have a wild night on the town anyway! So how you'd ditch the rest of the 'Busters?"

"Left 'em at the hotel in Muddy Flat," Peter answered glumly. "I tried calling them, but I guess they're already on the way back to New York. Guess Egon's Paraphysical Conference is a dead loss, too — no pun intended."

Edgar laughed, and started steering his new-found companion toward a nearby building. "Let's grab a couple of brewskis and you can tell me all about it — and then I'll tell you about this great lead I'm working on ..."

Benny followed them into a dark bar and settled unseen in a corner of the booth they chose. "This is great, guys, but what's with the Memorex replay? Did I slip out of the timestream or something?"

Neither of his companions answered his questions.

"This place is a ghost-hunter's dream," Edgar was saying when Benny returned his attention to the duo. "There's this one great place in the French Quarter where they say they can still hear the rattle of chains, the moans and shrieks of the slaves being tortured —"

"I'll pass," Peter cut in.

"This slave owner had a mulatto lover who helped her torture her old slaves and children," Edgar continued, ignoring Peter's interruption. His voice and gestures grew more melodramatic. "She forced a little girl to jump out an upper story window, plummeting to her death. The woman was arrested and executed, but she and her lover continue their inhuman pastimes and on a clear night the screams of their victims can be heard

echoing ... echoing —" Edgar broke off, waiting for Peter's response.

"Sounds like it's right up your alley, Benedek," Peter observed, sipping his beer. "But you can count me out on this one."

"I can't believe you said that," Edgar objected, as Benny shook his head dolefully. "The great Dr. V, refusing a chance to bust some evil spirits just because he's on vacation!"

"That's not it," Peter retorted. "It's because I haven't got anything to bust them with, 'cause the stupid airline sent our proton packs to Honolulu!" He realized that his voice had risen, and added more quietly, "And anyway, nobody's hired us, and Mama Venkman's little boy doesn't work for free."

"Not even for free publicity for you and the Ghostbusters?"

"From that rag you work for, Benny?" Peter snorted in disgust. "Give me a break."

Edgar shrugged, seemingly unperturbed by the slur against the *National Register*. Benny had to smile — he'd heard a lot worse from Juliana Moorhouse. "Suit yourself. I'm not here for that, anyway. What do you know about Voodoo, Pete?"

Benny was looking at his past-self with a mixture of apprehension and insight. "So *that's* what this is all about! But why involve Jonathan? I didn't even know him then!"

"Voodoo?" Peter repeated. "Ray made me read some books on it, but they had too many pictures of creepy-crawlies in them for much of the stuff to sink in. I did try making a doll of Egon once, though." He looked reminiscent. "I stuck a needle through the middle of it and left it in his bed. He just pulled the needle out and gave Slimer the doll to play with." He sighed. "Sometimes he's just no fun."

Edgar leaned forward. "How you'd like to meet a real Voodoo Priestess tonight?"

Peter considered the idea. "Is she cute?"

"Cute? We're talking Miss Universe here, pal," Edgar assured him, his hands forming a shapely outline.

Peter looked askance at the top-heavy proportions Benedek indicated, but the journalist did have a knack for knowing — interesting — women. "She doesn't have a pet boa or anything like that, does she?" he asked suspiciously.

"V-man, you have watched entirely too many horror flicks with Ray."

"With a friend of yours, anything is possible," Peter retorted.

Edgar just grinned and motioned for the waitress to bring two more beers. "Keep that in mind, Petey-boy — *anything* is possible." He wagged his eyebrows in a suggestive manner.

"Why are you willing to share such a 'treasure'?" Peter wasn't about to easily give up his suspicions about Benny's motives. He'd known the journalist far too long to trust him. Edgar Benedek was cut from the same cloth as Charlie Venkman, and Benny's own father was even worse. Peter still wasn't sure who was to blame for that fiasco in Dubuque but he wasn't about to forget it, either. Charlie had thought it a great scam and wanted to set up a partnership with Michael Benedek and it had taken every fast-thinking, fast-talking gene Peter possessed to talk his dad out of it.

He took a draught of his beer, oblivious to the startled look he was receiving from the unseen Benny.

"I never knew you felt that way, Pete," Benny murmured, confused by his sudden ability to "hear" Venkman's thoughts. "Hey, I wonder if the psychic stuff goes along with whatever's happened to me?" He grinned lopsidedly. "Heck, I wonder if it'll stick till I get back. Sure would be fun to try out on Dr. M, or Jack ..." He stopped smiling, remembering that Jonathan was missing. "Maybe not, if part of the deal is being invisible."

"Your distrust hurts, V-man," Edgar said, grinning ingenuously. "I can't believe you suspect me of having an ulterior motive!"

"I can't believe I was ever that shallow," Benny muttered, his tone disgusted as he eyed his doppelganger. "Put a sock in it and tell him the truth, Edgar."

"The truth is, I want an interview with Madame LeBrun, to top off the Voodoo chapter in my next

book, but she's a little reluctant to talk to me. She's a little ticked off about an article I had in the latest issue of the *National Register* and I thought maybe if a good-looking guy like you kind of smoothed the way ..."

"Yeah, I remember how that turned out," Benny said. "Say no, Petey."

Peter opened his mouth to reply, then paused. "That's all? Just an interview? No seances or mumbo-jumbo?"

"Nah, I just want to talk to her," Edgar assured him.

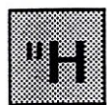
Peter shrugged. "Sure – why not?"

"Grrreat!" Edgar tossed some bills down on the table and stood up. "Let's go!!"

Benny sighed and followed them from the bar. "I have a lousy feeling about this." He had good reason to be apprehensive – Madame LeBrun had been more than "a little" angry with him, and then he'd shown up at her door without warning, with Peter in tow ... tempers had gotten out of hand, and they'd been lucky to escape with nothing worse than a few bruises and a twisted ankle for Peter.

"Whoa!" Benny snapped his fingers, struck by an idea. "Maybe this psychic stuff works two ways – maybe I can warn Pete not to tag along with me this time!" He focused his gaze on the Ghostbuster, brows drawn together in concentration. "Yo, Pete, can you hear me? It's me, Benny. You've gotta listen to me – Peter?"

Peter continued to accompany Edgar to the curbside, and followed him into a taxi. He gave no sign that he had heard Benny's telepathic entreaties. Benny sighed and hopped up on the back of the cab as it pulled away. Whoever was in charge seemed determined to play it out.



How far did you say it was, Egon?" Winston asked, one hand wiping at the sweat on his face. "It seems like we oughta be there by now, m'man. We've been walking for hours."

"Sure seems like it," Ray agreed, shifting the 40-pound pack on his back. "Wish we had some water."

Egon drew to a halt and checked his PKE meter. Despite the heat and exertion of the long hike, he was barely sweating and his always perfectly curled hair didn't display so much as a droop. "Hmm, this is extraordinarily odd."

"What's odd, Egon?" Ray asked, coming up behind Egon and leaning against his arm as he studied the PKE meter. "Wow! Peter must be moving as fast as we are – the readings indicate he's still 152.3 meters away."

"It seems highly unlikely that Peter would be maintaining the exact same pace." Egon frowned at the meter, then turned to Ray. "Check the readings on your meter, Ray."

The red-haired Ghostbuster nodded and pulled his meter from his pocket, turning to face the way they'd come. "Egon, this is really weird! The doorway – it's right there ... We haven't moved at all!"

"What?" exclaimed Winston, staring as Ray held out the meter for Egon to see. "All that walking and we're back where we started?"

"But we weren't walking in circles," Ray objected. His eyes widened as another idea struck him. "Hey – maybe we haven't moved at all! Maybe something's trying to prevent us from reaching Peter!"

Egon rubbed his chin. "Perhaps. But there is one other possibility, Raymond ... Something may be trying to prevent us from realizing we *have* reached Peter."

The three men looked at each other. "You mean, this could all be an illusion?" Winston asked. Egon nodded. "Oh, man."

"But if this *is* an illusion, why does it look like the Netherworld? Shouldn't it look like something familiar to whoever is doing this?"

"Ray, I do *not* like the sound of that," Winston complained.

"I must concur with you, Winston. Either this – someone – is personally familiar with the Netherworld or is able to access our memories. Either way –"

"— we're in deep trouble," Winston finished for the physicist.

"Precisely."

"How can we make ourselves see the reality of our surroundings?" Ray asked.

"I'm not certain. There seems little point in wearing ourselves out tramping around in circles —"

"Like rats in a maze," Winston said, sounding disgusted.

Ray and Egon looked at each other, then at the ex-soldier. "That's it!" the two scientists cried in chorus.

"Huh?"

"Egon, what happens to the rats when they stop running the maze?"

"It would seem logical to me that the experiment is ended, Raymond."

Winston frowned. "So what are we gonna do? Just sit still and hope for the best?"

Ray furrowed his brow, trying to formulate his idea into words. "Maybe if we stop walking, we can find out where we really are, and find Peter — and Benny, if he's here. Maybe we just need to stop thinking about the Netherworld, stop believing in what we see around us."

"Hmm. I concur. An excellent idea, Ray." Egon adjusted his glasses and sat down cross-legged on the ground, his gesture indicating that they should do the same. "I think we should coordinate our efforts to break through this illusion. Close your eyes and clear your minds of all impressions of our surroundings. Then open them slowly and allow your mind to absorb what you see without judgment."

"You've been reading Pete's shrink books again, haven't you, Egon?" Winston grumbled, even as he obeyed the physicist's instructions. "I just hope this works."

"As do I, Winston."

"All we can do is try," Ray said as he dropped down beside the other two. "Uh, maybe we should hold hands, just so we don't lose contact."

"I'm not that kind of guy," Winston warned. Nevertheless, he held his hands out and was grateful for the touch of Ray's hand. After a moment, Egon's fingers rested on Winston's palm, completing the connection.

"Remember, clear your mind of all impressions of what we've seen," Egon's deep voice instructed.

"Why is it getting windy?" Winston inquired a few moments later when swirls of wind began to wrap around them.

"Keep your eyes closed! Concentrate!" Egon shouted as the wind intensified, tearing at their hair and clothes.

"W-what is it?" Ray called out, tightening his grip on the hands he held.

"It ain't the Easter Bunny, Ray!"

"This is merely a distraction!" Egon reminded them. "Whatever happens, don't break contact, gentlemen!"

Jonathan gave a start and lifted his head, realizing he had been dozing. He glanced at Peter Venkman, who was still snoring beside him, then rubbed his eyes and squinted at the sky. The sun had finally left the lemony sky, and the horizon was lit up with slashes of orange and red. With a yawn, he poked his companion in the ribs. "Wake up, Venkman. We'd better be finding a proper campsite before it gets darker."

"Later, Mom," Peter murmured, batting ineffectually at Jonathan. "I'll get ready for school later ..."

Jonathan frowned and shook the Ghostbuster. "It's time to wake up, Doctor."

"Get your hands off me, Egon," Peter said in a threatening voice.

Jonathan immediately removed his hands. "Dr. Venkman, we must find a campsite before full dark. It's too dangerous to stay exposed —"

"Dangerous?" Peter sat up, eyes wide as he stared at Jonathan. "Oh, yeah, right. Let's make tracks, Jack."

"Jonathan — or Jon," the professor corrected automatically as they got to their feet.

"Right — sorry. I wonder what's keeping the guys? They should have been here by now," Peter said with a frown.

"Apparently whoever is orchestrating this — this scenario doesn't want them here," Jonathan theorized, dusting off his trousers and missing the expression on Peter's face.

"Then what has he-she-it done with 'em?"

Startled by the fear in Peter's voice, Jonathan looked up and met the other man's green eyes. "Why, I don't know — possibly nothing. It just may be making it impossible for them to follow our trail."

"The guys won't just give up," Peter insisted. "They wouldn't just accept a dead end and quit, not my guys. Egon and Ray will use every piece of equipment they can lay their grubby little paws on, as well as every little gray cell they've got to figure out a way to find me. And if they find me, they find you. Wait a minute! Benny was with them — if he's the real target, they may be trapped with him and *can't* come after us!"

"Trapped?" repeated Jonathan, not liking the sound of that. "Now calm down, we don't know that for certain yet. Let's deal with our immediate problems first, and worry about them later."

"Later?" Peter exclaimed. "You don't understand! These are my pals, and they're probably in the clutches of a demon right now!"

"And what are we supposed to do about it?" Jonathan demanded. "I think staying alive would be an excellent start. Come on, Venkman." He grabbed the Ghostbuster's arm and pointed at the horizon. "Do you hear those roars?"

Peter listened. "Yeah, they sound like — lions?"

Jonathan nodded. "And they're getting closer. We'd better start climbing into one of these trees."

"When you're right, you're right," Peter grumbled, glancing up at the tree above them. "The branches are a little high —"

"I'll give you a boost," Jonathan offered, bending his knees and bracing his hands palm up and fingers laced together.

"Why don't —"

Another roar from the lions made up Peter's mind and he sprang onto Jonathan's hands while reaching up for the bottom branch. Jonathan practically threw Peter up into the tree then tried to jump up high enough to catch the bottom branch.

"Grab my foot!" Peter called, his arms wrapped around the branch as he looked down at the frantic professor. "C'mon, Jonathan!"

Jonathan grasped the boot dangling in front of his face and Peter grunted as he pulled his leg up.

"Give me a little help here, Jon! Grab a branch or something!"

Jonathan glanced around and found a branch but his fingers slipped and he slid down until his chin was resting on Peter's boot toe. Teeth gritted, Peter wrapped one arm around his branch and reached down with his other hand to grab the back of Jonathan's shirt.

"Now!" Jonathan shouted, giving another leap upward. Peter obediently yanked the anthropologist up into the tree, and within moments they were sharing the broad branch, legs dangling as if they were sitting on a trapeze's crossbar. "Thank you, Peter. That was — extremely helpful," Jonathan said between gasps.

"Any time, pal," Peter replied, rather exhilarated by the adrenaline rush, now that the action was over. "You're not bad yourself, for a professor," he added magnanimously, conveniently ignoring the fact that he had been a professor himself once.

"Thanks," Jonathan answered with a wry smile. "I've had a lot of practice lately. This past year I've had to run from a lot of bizarre situations. Benny was investigating what he thought was a zombie factory but in fact the doctor was selling human organs, and Benny very nearly was an involuntary contributor. We had to run from what

Benny called the goon squad. Then there was the gang of Pharaoh worshippers who were going to use Benny as a human sacrifice —"

"Until you saved him, right? Let me guess: In every escapade involving Edgar Benedek you pulled his fat from the fire at risk to your own life," Peter conjectured, grinning at the astonished look on the other man's face.

"How did you — ?"

"Hey, I told you I've known Benny a long time," Peter dismissed.

"Apparently his *modus operandi* hasn't changed," Jonathan said dryly, settling on the branch and bracing his back against the trunk. "How *did* you meet Benedek?"

"Oh, we were in Juvie Hall together," Peter dropped casually, and Jonathan nearly slipped off his branch.

"Juvie Hall? You — you were juvenile delinquents?" Jonathan's voice squeaked up an octave, much as it did whenever Benny blithely added to the expense account.

Peter grabbed Jonathan to steady him. "Chill out, pal. I was only there until Social Services could contact my mom. I was, uh, lost and they had to do something with me until Mom claimed me." From his tone of voice, Jonathan could tell there was more, probably involving Peter's father, but the Ghostbuster wasn't forthcoming with details. "I'm not sure why Benny was there, but he knew the ropes and showed me around. He apparently thought that made us buddies for life."

"Sometimes he reminds me of an overly-friendly large puppy who doesn't realize he's worn out his welcome," Jonathan sighed. "I'm forever trying to keep him out of Dr. Moorhouse's hair, but he seems to delight in tormenting her."

"Well, I can understand that," Peter commented, an impish twinkle in his eyes. "She just begs to be tormented."

"You know —"

"One class with her, but that was plenty," Peter interrupted, answering Jonathan's question before he could complete it. "She's your boss, huh?"

"Dr. Moorhouse runs a very efficient department," Jonathan said in her defense, correctly reading the sympathy in Peter's tone.

"I'm sure she does. Sooo — we spend the night up here? If you don't mind, I think I'll find a branch of my own," Peter said, shifting on his end of the branch and making it sway.

"But —"

"I don't share a branch overnight on the first date."

Once again Jonathan had the eerie feeling he'd just heard Edgar Benedek. Jonathan pressed his back against the tree trunk as Peter scooted closer until he could reach over Jonathan's head and grasp the trunk to brace himself as he got to his feet.

"Give me a boost, willya?" Peter requested, reaching up and draping his arms around the next branch.

Wobbling, Jonathan grabbed Peter's ankles and hefted him up. When he released Peter's feet, Jonathan cried out and waved his arms to regain his balance.

"Jon, you okay?" Peter called down from his branch.

Facedown and arms hugging the branch, Jonathan squeaked out an affirmative answer and kept his eyes squeezed shut until his frantic heartbeat slowed down to normal and he was no longer gulping in huge breaths of air. Gradually he pushed himself up into a sitting position and leaned back against the trunk. "Dr. Venkman?"

"Yeah, Jon?"

"Are you all right?"

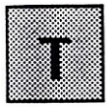
"Just peachy."

"Wonderful." Jonathan closed his eyes, and swallowed hard. How did he get into these situations?

"MacKensie?"

"Yes?"

"Which one of us calls for room service?"



he three Ghostbusters held fast to each other's hands, their eyes tightly closed as the whirlwind buffeted them. Then, abruptly, there was silence and stillness.

Winston cautiously opened his eyes, blinked and stared. "Guys — looks like we're not in Kansas anymore."

Egon and Ray looked around them. The Netherscape had been replaced by a featureless white mist, which swirled around them. It was like the densest coastal fog imaginable, except it was neither damp nor cold.

"Someone's coming," Ray observed.

An elderly black man approached them from out of the fog. He limped, and used a cane for support. Upon reaching them, he halted and leaned upon the cane, watching the three men.

"Hello," Ray said tentatively. "Could you please tell us where we are, sir?"

The old man smiled. "At the Threshold between Worlds, young man. But you three are not dead, nor did you come here by calling me. I may be old, but my hearing is as good as ever it was. How did you manage it?"

"We are looking for some friends of ours —" Egon began.

"Jonathan disappeared first," Ray put in earnestly. "Then Peter, and we lost Benny when we came through the door."

"Three more intruders? I did not bring your friends to this place, yet I sense they are here."

"Are they alive?" Egon demanded tersely.

"For now."

"What?" yelled Ray as he scrambled to his feet. "What does that mean?"

Egon rose more sedately, his expression grim. "I think you had better explain yourself, sir."

The stranger shrugged. "Explanations are simple, provided one asks the right questions."

"Now see here —"

Winston stood up and put his hand on Egon's sleeve. "Chill out, guys. Threats aren't the way to talk to him."

"But if he's hurt Peter —" Ray began, breaking off as Winston shook his head warningly.

"Do you know who this person is, Winston?" Egon inquired in a low voice.

"I think so." The black Ghostbuster turned to the elderly man. "My Grandma used to tell me stories about you, mister. She said your name was Papa Legba, and that you're the Gatekeeper of the loas."

"Loas?" Egon repeated under his breath. "The spirits of voodoo —?"

"Voodoo," Ray murmured. "This is great!"

Ignoring his companions, Winston dug a pack of gum out of his pocket and extended it toward Papa Legba. "Sorry this isn't more, sir, it's all I've got. Would you please sit down and tell us what has happened to our friends?"

The old man studied him, then nodded approvingly and accepted the package of gum. "I was wondering when you would recognize me, Winston Zeddemore. You represent your ancestors well, remembering their teachings."

"Thank you." Winston's eyes widened as Legba waved his cane, dissipating the mist behind him until it formed into a wooden chair. The old man settled into it with a sigh of pleasure, then waved his cane once more. Three wooden stools materialized, ranged around a large free-standing mirror.

"Sit, all of you. I will show you what you ask."

The Ghostbusters exchanged glances, then obeyed. At Legba's gesture, they looked into the mirror, watching with astonishment as their reflections wavered and dissipated.

"It's Peter!" Ray exclaimed excitedly, pointing.

"That must be Dr. MacKensie," Winston suggested, his gaze on the two men in a tree.

"Yes, I've met him, and that's Jonathan MacKensie," Egon confirmed.

"Why are they in a tree?"

"Presumably for safety's sake, Raymond."

"Yeah, Pete's not crazy about heights, even though he handles it pretty well. He sure wouldn't voluntarily shimmy up a tree unless it was to save his butt," Winston pointed out.

"From what?"

"Perhaps the Ramapithecus, or rather, the creature masquerading as a Ramapithecus," Egon speculated.

"Masquerading? You mean it's not really a Rama-whatsis?"

"To date, Winston, there is no evidence to substantiate the existence of a protohominid known as Ramapithecus. I believe it to be ancestral to apes, particularly orangutans, rather than man. However, Dr. MacKensie belongs to the school of thought which supports Ramapithecus as the possible 'missing link' and he is the one the creature first appeared to and attacked. It is his belief which is giving life, as it were, to this creature."

"So, what you're saying, Egon, is that as long as Jonathan believes he's being pursued by Ramapithecus, he'll continue to see Ramapithecus. Wow, this is incredible!"

"And Peter has no reason to suspect otherwise. We were called in to investigate the appearance of Ramapithecus, and if Peter has witnessed the same illusion he will believe it to be this creature."

"Adding to the strength of the illusion. How can we help, though? We're here — wherever *here* is — and they're wherever they are," Ray said, frowning as he studied the mirror's image.

"Nail on the head, homeboy."

"And what about Benny? Is he with them?" Ray looked at Papa Legba and the old man just smiled. Mist swirled in the mirror, reforming the image into that of Edgar Benedek watching a pair of men as they stood before a door. The focus of the mirror narrowed in on the two men.

"Wait a minute! How can Benny be watching Peter? We just saw Pete with Dr. MacKensie. And that other guy —"

"— is also Edgar Benedek," Egon finished Winston's statement.

"Benny is watching Peter and himself?"

The others looked at Ray, then at Papa Legba as he said, "Your friend Benedek is witnessing the shadows of what once was. He is confronting the man he used to be."

"So it's another illusion," Ray guessed, turning his gaze back to the mirror.

"That's some trip," Winston agreed. "But who's making him do this? And why?"

Egon had aimed his PKE meter at the mirror and was studying the readings. "Gentlemen, it appears that both of these illusions are the result of the same spell. But as to who has placed the spell into effect —" He shrugged and shook his head.

"Watch, and find out," advised Papa Legba. He settled back in his chair, his interested gaze on the scene in the mirror.

"Are you sure she's expecting us, Benny?" Peter asked his companion, glancing dubiously up at the darkened front of the brick house in New Orleans.

"Absolutely," Edgar answered, his grin never fading. "Don't worry about a thing!"

"Don't listen to me, Petey! There's still time for you to turn tail and get gone," Benny shouted at the Ghostbuster.

The latter shook his head slightly, almost as if he had heard the invisible journalist, then jammed his hands into his pockets and shifted from foot to foot. "Well, if she doesn't answer in five minutes, I'm leaving. It's cold out here!"

"Not to worry," Edgar said, as he pulled something thin and pointed from his jacket pocket and bent over the keyhole in the door. "I'll have us inside, warm and toasty, in a jiff!"

"Huh? Wait a minute, Benny — you didn't say anything about breaking and entering!"

"Relaxavision, buds, I'm not breaking a thing," Edgar said breezily, making a triumphant grunt as the lock clicked. "See?"

"It's still illegal, and I'm not going in there," Peter protested. A sudden gust of chill wind ruffled his hair, and goosebumps popped up on his bare arms. "Welll, okay, I'll just stand inside the door out of the wind, but I'm not taking part in the rest of your harebrained scheme."

"Where's your sense of adventure, pal?"

"Back in New York, where I should be," Peter grumbled.

"C'mon, Dr. V," Edgar cajoled, ignoring his complaints. He replaced the lockpick in his pocket and took out a pen-sized flashlight, thumbing it on as he crept into the house.

"Benny!" Peter shivered, then sidled into the foyer, his arms crossed over his chest. "Benedek, this is a lousy idea. Come back here and let's go."

"I'll second that," Benny called after himself. "Edgar, you don't know what you're getting into!"

There was a yelp from Edgar, and Peter ran toward the sound of his voice without a second thought. He bumped against the journalist and grabbed him, then they both went down in a tangle of arms and legs. "Benny, are you all right?"

"Tripped over the cat," Edgar admitted.

"Benny, I'm going to —" Peter's threat was interrupted as the lights suddenly came on, revealing a woman standing in the open doorway.

Peter's emerald green eyes widened in appreciation as he looked up at the stunning beauty. A faint blush of anger highlighted elegant cheekbones, and fire flashed in the dark eyes. Long black ringlets were held back with a multicolored scarf, and bracelets of gold and silver jangled on slender bare arms. The low-necked ruffled blouse offered tantalizing glimpses of cafe-au-lait bosom, and the flounces of her tiered skirt swirled about trim ankles.

"I told you, Mr. Benedek, I would not have you in this house again," she warned, her throaty Creole-accented voice sending ripples down

Peter's spine. "You would risk the wrath of Santera?"

"I'm really sorry about that little misunderstanding," Edgar began, scrambling to his feet and offering her his flash-and-dazzle grin.

"Little? Printing my image in your newspaper against my express command, revealing secrets despite my warnings you dare to call a 'little misunderstanding'? And now you push my patience to the very limit by breaking into my home. Do you recall my promise?"

"You mean that bit about claiming my soul, turning me into a zombie?"

"I'm not with him!" Peter blurted, leaping to his feet and backing away from her.

"Then how did you come to be in my house, uninvited?" she purred, approaching him and running a finger along his jaw.

"Well, I was with him, but I had no idea! He — he tricked me!"

"Yes, I'm sure he did," she agreed, casting a chilly glance over her shoulder at Benedek. "What shall I do with him, do you think?"

"Uh — well, I know a real good lawyer if you want to sue him, ma'am," Peter said. "He wouldn't make a very good zombie at all ..."

"That's right, I wouldn't," Edgar said, offering a crooked smile. "Look, Peter didn't do anything, Madame LeBrun, so why don't you just let him go, and I'll promise cross my heart to get lost, too —"

The voodoo priestess narrowed her eyes at him, and the door slammed shut with a gust of wind, effectively closing off their escape route. "I don't think so, Mr. Benedek. You need to be taught a lesson about dabbling with mysteries you don't understand."

"Listen, this looks like it should be a private lesson and I'm just an extra —"

"You shall share the lesson."

"Oh, hey, don't trouble yourself on my account —"

"It will be no trouble," she assured Peter, smiling silkily.

Peter swallowed hard as she cupped his face between her hands and placed a kiss on his slightly-parted lips. Her breath was amazingly hot and he opened his mouth as if to draw her in.

"Pete —" both Edgar and the watching Benedek cried in warning.

Madame LeBrun broke from the kiss and glanced over her shoulder at Edgar. "Be quiet, Mr. Benedek." She smiled as the journalist gasped and clutched his throat, his voice suddenly gone. "That's better. Now —" She returned her attention to the man before her. "Tell me your name."

"Peter Charles Venkman," the Ghostbuster replied obediently, his gaze locked with hers.

"Peter ..." she murmured. "Yes, you'll do, I think. Would you like me to kiss you again, Peter?"

He nodded and nuzzled her throat, looking disappointed when she held him at arm's length. "Later, Mr. Venkman. For now you will do me a favor, eh?"

"Anything," he agreed.

She patted his cheek, then turned and led him over to the horrified Edgar. "Take hold of Mr. Benedek's arms."

"Pete!" Benny shouted, as the enchanted Venkman grabbed Edgar.

"Very good. Now bring him to the room I shall show you."

Peter nodded solemnly and marched the struggling Edgar along behind the priestess as she climbed the staircase.

Benny watched them go, his shoulders sagging. "It was all my fault," he said, shaking his head. "I should never have brought him here ..."

W

hat's happening to Peter?" Ray demanded, turning to the loa who was leaning back in his chair, a tall beverage glass in one hand.

Papa Legba waved a hand in negation. "You forget, young man — this has *already* happened to him."

"It couldn't have!" Ray objected. "We'd remember —" he paused and looked uncertainly at Egon. "Wouldn't we?"

The physicist pushed his glasses to their proper place on the bridge of his nose. "Not if we didn't know about it, Raymond."

"Peter was on his own for a few days in New Orleans," Winston said thoughtfully. "And he was pretty pissed off when he found out that we'd gone to Hawaii on the airline's nickel. Maybe ..."

"Maybe he didn't *want* to tell us," Ray suggested, sounding concerned and a little hurt.

Egon nodded slowly. "Indeed."

"Anybody want a rum and cola?" Papa Legba inquired, sipping his own drink.

"No, thanks," Winston replied absently for his companions, who were staring into the mirror again.

Legba sighed and glanced at Madame LeBrun's image. "I know that one. She has a temper! Your friends were fortunate to escape ..."

"Escape?" Ray's voice was hopeful. "Sure, they must have escaped, right?" He happily returned his attention to the mirror.

M

adame LeBrun stood in the doorway to a darkened attic room. "Bring him in here, Peter." She moved aside to allow them to pass.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered as he shoved Edgar across the threshold.

"Now I want you to wait here while I make some preparations." She smiled and gently pushed him back into the room as he made a move to follow her, then closed the door in his face and locked it.

Edgar whirled, his hands to his throat, then took a deep breath of air and said, "Petey — snap out of it! We've got to blow this voodoo popstand! Pete?"

"Listen to me, Dr. V," Benny advised as he walked through the closed door. He noticed his growing insubstantiality and gave a start, examining his hand, then pushing it halfway into the wall. "C'mon, guys — you've *gotta* get out. I know you can do it! We did it before, remember?" He walked over to the glassy-eyed Peter and peered into the vacant stare. "You're not gonna let her get away with it, are you? Fight it, Peter!"

"If we can just pry this window open," Edgar was saying, tugging on the window sash. "Give me a hand, Pete."

"Wait a minute! That window wasn't locked," Benny exclaimed, going over to inspect the window his doppelganger was struggling to open. "It was the shutters that gave us problems ..."

"Whoa!" Edgar cried, stumbling back when the window suddenly shot up and he overbalanced, nearly falling through. "Unless we sprout wings, bunky, we're not getting out this way. I don't know about you, but three-story falls are not my speciality — makes me scream a lot. Where's the fire department when you need 'em, I ask ya? A little hook-and-ladder action and we'd be out of here in nothing flat. Wonder if there's anything in here we can knot together for a rope, the old bedsheet-out-the-window-routine. Too bad Rapunzel doesn't live here ..."

"Put a lid on it, Edgar," Benny growled at himself, poking a finger into the Hawaiian shirted chest. "No wonder Jonny's got gray hairs."

He left his former self rummaging in the corners of the attic, still muttering to himself, and went back to the motionless Peter. "You know, Dr. V, we could really use some expert Ghostbuster advice right about now. Wakey, wakey!" He snapped his fingers in front of Peter's face, then frowned when there was no reaction. "Okay, so the direct approach's out ..." Benny closed his eyes and concentrated on reaching the other man's mind. "Come on, Pete, you're more psychic than you think. Wake up and smell the coffee!"

"Not if Egon made it," Peter mumbled. He blinked, and looked around in confusion. "Benny?"

"Gimme a hand with this, Petey," Edgar said, as he struggled with a coil of rope he'd found. It was

old and stiff, and the ends were unravelling, but he began dragging it toward the window.

"Hey, the guy just came back from a trip to La-La land," Benny told Edgar. "The least you could do would be to ask him if he's okay!"

Edgar stopped and looked at the Ghostbuster. "You all right, Peter?"

"Uh — yeah, I guess so," Venkman answered, covering the fact that he had very little idea what had just happened to him. "What are you doing?"

"Coming up with a brilliant escape plan, if I do say so myself, while you've been listening to your hormones instead of your buddy. That is one mad mamma, Pete, and I don't intend to hang around here while she makes her little 'preparations'," Edgar proclaimed, looping one end of the rope around a broomstick and then tossing the free end out the window. "Ta-da!"

"Ta-da? What 'ta-da'?" Peter demanded, giving Edgar a suspicious look.

"We climb down —"

"— that — that fraying hunk of string? Are you nuts, Benedek?"

"It's either the rope or Madame LeBrun and her homemade zombie kit," Edgar pointed out. "The broomstick is wider than the window so it'll hold the rope secure while we shimmy down —"

"I'm not shimmying down anything!"

"That's what he said last time, too," Benny remarked to his alter ego.

Edgar glared at Venkman, who had folded his arms stubbornly. "If you've got any better ideas, let's hear 'em."

"Well, uh —"

"Yeah, thought so. You can stay here and be the Wicked Witch of the South's love slave, if you want, but *I'm* flying the coop! So long, pal." He turned back to the window and began to climb down his makeshift escape route.

"Love slave? Just what do you mean by that, Benedek? Get back here! Don't you leave me

here — Benedek!" Peter ran over to the window and looked down to see Edgar clinging to the rope. The broomstick bent outward alarmingly, but it seemed to be holding. "I hope I live to regret this," the Ghostbuster muttered, climbing out the window.

"Yo, Pete! Hustle it, will ya?" Benny called in a stage whisper from the safety of the ground.

"I'm hurrying as fast as I can, Benedek," Peter retorted, causing Edgar to look up in bewilderment, since he hadn't said anything.

Benny's jaw dropped. "You *heard* me, V-man?!"

"Of *course* I heard you, Benny! Cut the chit-chat and get out of my way before I fall on you!"

Edgar shook his head and muttered, "A mind is a terrible thing to lose ..." He shimmied down the rest of the rope's length, jumping the last few feet and landing in the flowerbed beside the house's side.

"Peter, look out!" Benny yelled as his other self scrambled to his feet and stood next to him.

Clinging to the rope, Peter glanced up and paled at the sight of Madame LeBrun at the window, her upraised hand bringing down a machete on the rope and broomstick. He screamed and plummeted to the ground, landing with a sickening thud.

"No!" Benny and Edgar cried in unison as the Ghostbuster landed, hard, and didn't move.

Edgar ran to Peter's side, while Benny stared in disbelief. "It didn't happen this way! Pete was further down — he jumped and landed on me — didn't get worse than a sprained ankle!"

"Petey, wake up," Edgar pleaded as he shook his friend's shoulder. "No ..."

"You killed him!" Benny shouted at the voodoo priestess. "Why?"

She smiled at Benny and lifted both hands in a palms-out gesture. A ball of fire sprang from her fingertips and hurtled toward the ground, engulfing Edgar.

He and Benny screamed in shared agony, before Edgar simply vanished, leaving Benny alone in darkness.



Jonathan MacKensie gasped and opened his eyes, disoriented until he felt the bark of the tree against his back. "Benedek?" he whispered. "Where are you?"

From the overhead branch came the snuffling sound of Venkman's breathing, and Jonathan smiled a little, recalling his bizarre situation. He gazed at the horizon, realizing the sky was lighter, as though dawn was nearing.

His eyes drifted shut again, and he pulled his jacket closer around himself, trying to get comfortable enough to go back to sleep.

The sound of Benedek's scream brought him wide awake, heart pounding at the realization that this was not a nightmare.

"Dr. Venkman? Peter? Did you hear that?" he called up, tugging on the foot which dangled near his head.

"I'm sorry to say I did," Peter replied sourly. "I suppose you're gonna tell me it wasn't some wild animal with sinus trouble."

"It was human," Jonathan declared, scrambling down from his branch. "Benedek, I think."

"Not necessarily human then," Peter wisecracked.

"Dr. Venkman," Jonathan chided in the same tone Egon often used.

Peter heaved a resigned sigh and slowly straightened up. "You're gonna insist on checking it out, aren't you? Did you stop to think it might be a wild animal's breakfast and our interference might not be appreciated?"

"And then again, it might be," Jonathan pointed out from the ground. "I won't be long — I hope."

"Hold it right there, bunky," the Ghostbuster called, shifting on his branch until he could begin the downward climb. "You're not leaving *me* here alone! What if your Rama-whatziz comes back and wants a breakfast companion?"

"Dr. Venkman —"

"Uh-uh, pal. We stay together — got it?"

"All right, but let's hurry!" Jonathan stood by impatiently until Peter had reached the ground beside him.

Another blood-curdling scream caused them to wheel in alarm, looking in all directions for its source. "Where's that coming from?" Peter asked.

"This way!" Jonathan decided, taking off at a run in an apparently-random direction.

"Are you sure?" Peter called, even as he dashed after his companion.

They hurried through the sparse forest, dodging the stray low-hanging branch, and emerging out onto the rocky plain they had crossed the afternoon before. Jonathan halted, causing Peter to skid into him. "Hey, watch it, professor! What's —" he broke off as Jonathan pointed at a huddled figure near the cairn they had left behind them. "Benedek?"

"Come on!" The anthropologist sprinted toward the lone man, Peter on his heels.

Benny's eyes flashed open at the touch on his shoulder, and he tried to scramble away from his attacker. "Lemme go!"

"Benedek!" Jonathan exclaimed, his grip tightening on the disoriented journalist. "Benny! It's all right! I'm not going to hurt you!"

"Jonny?" The slighter man paused, his gaze focusing on the worried face of his friend. "Jack! Am I glad to see you!"

Jonathan grinned as Benny hugged him. "You're all right, then? What happened?"

"It was awful, Jon — she killed Peter! We've gotta get out of here ..." He stopped, looking puzzled as he took in his surroundings. "Pete? Is that you?"

"Yeah, Benny, and I've got news for you — I'm not dead. So forget about that obituary you're working on, huh?"

Benny nodded dumbly, allowing Jonathan to help him to his feet. "You didn't see Madame LeBrun?"

"Who?" queried Jonathan, frowning.

"Not unless she looks like a Rama-whosis," Peter said.

"Ramapithecus," Benny corrected, causing Jonathan to lift an astonished eyebrow. "Whew — I'm gonna have to lay off pizza with pickles and jellybeans before bedtime!"

Jonathan and Peter exchanged similar glances of disgust. "The sun's coming up," Jonathan observed. "Let's get you out of the open before sunstroke adds to your — er, condition." He held onto Benny's arm, a concerned look in his brown eyes.

"So you think I'm delusional, Doubting Jon? Then how do you explain all this?" Benny demanded, waving a hand to indicate the African landscape. "What makes you think what I've been through is any less real than all this, huh?"

"First off, I'm not dead," Peter pointed out, taking Benny by the other arm. "And I don't intend to conveniently kick off just to give reality to your little delusion."

"But I saw you die ... I died," Benny said slowly as the two taller men flanked him to escort him to the shade of the tree. "But I didn't die in New Orleans, and neither did you. So why did it happen that way? What was the point?"

"New Orleans?"

"Yeah, Pete, I just retro-cogged our little adventure in New Orleans but it went wacky."

"This whole thing has been wacky," Jonathan muttered. "One moment I'm teaching a perfectly normal class and the next I'm being attacked by a Ramapithecus. I've spent the night in a tree on the African Savannah and you suddenly appear, spouting more nonsense about people being dead who aren't and I don't even know how I got here!"

"And I want to know where the guys are," Peter added, letting go of Benny's arm when they reached the tree. "They'd have been here by now if they were all okay, so something's happened to 'em."

Benny looked worried. "They were all fine when we went through that dimensional doorway. Then I was standing on a streetcorner in the Big Easy, and they weren't with me."

"Start from the beginning, Benedek," Jonathan suggested. The three men settled themselves at the base of the tree, and Benny began recounting his adventures.



ay looked at his friends. "Isn't there anything we can do to help them?"

Egon was frowning. "That would necessitate our being able to reach them — and I doubt very much that this Madame LeBrun would allow us to do so. She appears to be controlling their environment."

"Benedek's thrower and pack are missing," Winston observed. "But we still have ours — if we can get to the guys, we can help them get out of this mess."

As one, the three Ghostbusters turned to their host, but before they could speak, the loa shook his head. "You three are safe as long as you're here with me, but if you leave ... Well, there won't be much I can do to protect you. Are you sure you want to get involved in this business?"

"We are already involved, Mr. Legba," Egon intoned gravely.

"Peter's our friend," Ray agreed. "And Mr. Benedek and Dr. MacKensie are our clients. We can't just ignore them!"

Papa Legba nodded in approval, then met Winston's gaze. "The LeBrun woman is devoted to Santera, the loa of love and jealousy. She may try to distract you from your goal by sending spirits in — shall we say, pleasing forms? But if you remain resolute, you will succeed. Go to your friends — and take care." He waved his cane, and the mist disappeared, taking him with it.

The Ghostbusters were standing on an African Savannah, facing the rising sun. Egon met his comrades' glances, then consulted his PKE meter. "That way, gentlemen," he advised, pointing north.

They set off silently, half-expecting to be blasted with hurricane winds, or struck dead by lightning.

But nothing happened, and they gradually relaxed a little.

"What did he mean about the loa of love and jealousy? Did it make Madame LeBrun mad when Peter and Benny escaped the first time? Is that why she made Benny relive the escape with a different ending?" Ray asked as they trudged along.

"Possibly," Egon said, studying his PKE meter. "It is obvious she wishes revenge, whether the slight was real or only in her mind."

"Pete can tick off a lady, but he can usually soothe her ruffled feathers," Winston pointed out, shifting the thrower in his hand.

"I guess Peter got in over his head with this one," Ray sighed.

"No doubt Benedek's influence," Egon suggested, unaware he was echoing Juliana Moorhouse's sentiment.

"Benny doesn't seem like such a bad —"

Winston broke off in mid-sentence, and the other two paused to look at him. Only Winston Zeddemore was gone.

"Egon! What —" Ray turned to the physicist, eyes widening when he realized he was alone. "Egon? Winston?"

"You don't need them, *mon cher*."

Ray swallowed and blinked at the sight of the scantily clad woman taking his arm. "I, uh, what happened to the others?" he managed to squeak.

"They have been taken care of, and you need not worry about them," she purred, running a hand along his arm.

"They're my friends," Ray protested, watching her hand with all the fascination of a rabbit watching a cobra. "Of course I'm worried about them! They could be in danger ..."

"Do I seem like such a threat? Your friends are with — sisters of mine."

"Uh, ma'am, I've got to go find them," Ray said. "Could you please let go of my arm now?"

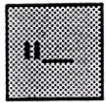
She pouted. "Don't you want me?"

"Want you to do what?" Ray asked innocently.

"Let me show you," she said suggestively, her hand reaching for the zipper of his jumpsuit while she nuzzled Ray's neck.

He blushed and backed away. "No! Please, ma'am, I don't have time for this right now."

She merely smiled and advanced on him.



guy, Egon. Uh, Egon? Ray?" Winston called, spinning around in desperation. "C'mon, guys, this isn't funny! Where is everybody?"

"I am all you need, *cher*."

Winston spun around again to face the owner of the sultry voice. "No offense, ma'am, but I need to find my friends," he said, watching as the woman seemed to drift toward him, layers of cloud-soft chiffon fluttering about her voluptuous figure.

"Do not concern yourself with them," she replied, one hand resting on his arm while the other reached up to stroke his cheek. "They have forgotten all about you —"

"No —" Winston protested weakly, catching her hand and pulling it away from his face. "No," he repeated, sounding more sure of himself. "We're a team, and we look after each other."

"Do you truly believe it is so? Your friends *have* forgotten," she told him, a swirl of chiffon brushing his face. "Watch and see, *mon amour*."

Winston caught his breath as the cloudy image of Ray Stantz embracing a nearly-nude woman appeared in the midst of the cloth. "Ray?" he whispered, staring.

"You see? This one does not concern himself with your well-being."

"All I've got is your word —"

"You deny the proof before your own eyes?"

"Proof? I see Ray with a woman, but how do I know it's of his own free will? He could be

fighting her off for all I know," Winston challenged.

"Why would a man deny himself the pleasure of her charms?"

"We're not talking just any man, lady, we're talking Ray Stantz. He has his priorities, and the safety of his friends comes a lot higher than a roll in the hay. He'd never even look at a woman under these circumstances ... unless —"

"Unless?"

"It's all part of a spell, isn't it? You're not really here, and Ray only thinks she's with him."

"Truly? What about this one?" Another wave of chiffon and the image of Ray Stantz blurred into Egon Spengler.

"You're using the wrong approach, Madame LeBrun!" Winston shouted, tilting his head back. "You've picked the wrong men to mess around with and the wrong game plan!"

"Have I, Winston Zeddemore? Watch and see!"

Wind rose around him, shrieking and pulling at him, and Winston was caught in a maelstrom of hostility and malice.



ay? Winston?" Egon called, looking around for his friends. By habit he checked the PKE meter and his blue eyes widened. "These are extraordinarily high readings," he muttered, adjusting the meter.

"I am for you, Egon Spengler."

He eyed the shapely blonde woman who was approaching him, then pocketed the PKE meter and reached over his shoulder for his thrower, pulling it free in a fluid motion. "I must warn you to halt where you are, madam," he informed her.

"Must you?" she said, pouting.

"Indeed." Egon's finger pressed the thrower's trigger, and the spirit before him was assaulted by a beam of pulsing yellow light and crackling blue energy. She threw her head back and screamed, then flew at the Ghostbuster, hands extended to claw at his face.

Egon dropped and rolled, keeping his proton rifle aimed up at the ghost as she passed over his head. A wind whipped his hair and clothing, blowing dust into his eyes and choking his throat.

"Told you so, lady," Winston said, activating his own thrower and targeting it almost by instinct on the dark-skinned woman who had taunted him. He was half-blinded by the wind and dust swirling around him as well, but he knew from her cry of outrage that he had made contact, and he steadfastly held the proton stream focused at his target.

Abruptly, there was silence. Winston squinted one eye open, then blinked and shut off his thrower. "Egon — ?"

The physicist lifted his head and looked at his comrade. "Winston, where is Raymond?"

"We'd better find him," Winston suggested, offering Egon a hand and pulling him to his feet. "Last I saw, he was being seduced by Mata Hari."

"We may be too late," Egon intoned solemnly, pushing his sliding glasses back up on the bridge of his nose. "If she is anything like the one who tried her charms on me, Ray will be defenseless."

"Don't sell him short, Egon," Winston protested. "Ray's not as innocent as you guys like to think he is. He *has* gone out on a few dates —"

"But nothing to prepare him for an assault such as this," Egon cut in. "Ray believes in the inherent goodness of everyone, and he's too much a gentleman to use his thrower on her — provided he still has his."

"No reason why he shouldn't have — we've got ours," Winston said, patting his thrower. "We didn't pass through any more gateways, like the one Pete fell through when he lost his pack. And even though Benny was carrying Pete's, he wouldn't think to hang onto it like we did ours."

"Hmm," Egon murmured, not totally convinced. "It's quite possible his innocence is his best weapon."

"What do you mean by that, Egon?"

"She just may succeed in her seduction, but she will never corrupt Ray."

"I hope you're right."

"Forget your friends, *mon cher*. I am all you need." She twined her fingers in Ray's hair, pulling his face close to hers.

"Uh, ma'am, I really hate to argue with a lady, but Egon, Peter and Winston are more than friends — they're my family. We're like brothers and we look out for each other. I'd give my life to save them."

"Would you?"

"Well, sure," Ray agreed, unaware of the calculating look in her eyes. "Any of us would risk our own lives for the others."

"Such devotion," his seducer said, her image blurring and reforming into that of Madame LeBrun. "I should like to see for myself if your friends are as devoted as you believe."

"B-but —"

"Come, *mon petit*," she invited, wrapping a length of scarf around his wrists. Before Ray could pull his hands free of the material, it metamorphosed into cold steel.

"It — it — how did you do *that*?"

"I can do many things which would amaze your little mind," LeBrun sneered. "Your friend Peter made a mistake when he chose to mess with Madame LeBrun."

"No offense, ma'am, but Peter's never mentioned you —"

"Silence!" shrieked the voodoo priestess, and a gag materialized over Ray's mouth. "Do not push me too far, little man."

Ray mumbled against the gag and tried to raise his manacled hands up to his mouth but a band of rope wrapped around his chest and waist, pinning his arms to his sides.

"Yes, this is much better," Madame LeBrun purred, holding one end of the rope and giving it a tug,

pulling Ray toward her. One index finger tipped Ray's head back and she held his wide-eyed gaze, staring deep into the amber depths. "No," she denied, taking a step back and narrowing her eyes. "I refuse to believe any man could hold such innocence, such goodness in his heart."

Ray blinked, obviously confused by her protest.

"No man is capable of such pureness of soul!"

"You are quite mistaken, madam," Egon announced, and she turned to see the two Ghostbusters standing with throwers drawn and aimed at her. "Please step away from Dr. Stantz."

"You can't be here! It's not possible — my power —"

"— isn't as great as you thought, lady," Winston broke in, flashing an insincere smile.

She stared at him, then slowly nodded. "So. He was right — you are all ready to risk your lives for each other."

"That is precisely correct, madam," Egon agreed solemnly, hefting his thrower for better aim.

"You've got that right," Winston asserted. "Let him go!"

Madame LeBrun tilted her head. "And if I release him, and return you to your world, will you be content with that?" She turned to Ray, one long-nailed finger caressing his neck above the pulse-point of his jugular vein. "Santera can be merciful, after all."

"We're not going anywhere without Pete and the others," Winston promised, as Egon shook his head and powered up his thrower. "Last warning, lady — get away from him, or we'll start shooting!"

"You will not harm your friend," she said, pulling Ray in front of her as a shield. "But he is no longer of interest to me — take him!" She shoved Ray toward them.

The bound man stumbled, and Winston reached out a steadying hand to help him. Ray blinked in amazement as his ropes and manacles faded away, and he tore the gag from his mouth. "Egon, stop her!"

Madame LeBrun laughed, waved her hand and vanished, leaving the three Ghostbusters staring at each other.

"Where did she go?"

"Are you okay, m'man?"

"This is an extraordinarily bad turn of events."

They all spoke at once, their voices a babble in the sudden silence.

"She's gone after Peter and the others, hasn't she?" Ray said worriedly.

"I'm afraid so, Raymond."

"Then so do we, right?"

Ray looked at Winston, then nodded. "There has to be a way for us to get to them. She can't be as all-powerful as she lets on, or else she'd strip us of our packs. She has to know by now that they're weapons."

"But why did Pete lose his? And then Benny lost it, too."

"I believe I have an answer to that, Winston," Egon said, his voice taking on his lecturing tone. "We were aware of the power we were facing and we concentrated on maintaining a grip on our throwers, whereas Peter merely fell through the doorway, ignorant of the fact he had even stepped through a dimensional doorway. Benedek was merely acting in the role of pack mule, carrying the proton pack until we could locate Peter. Our awareness and strength of concentration nullified her ability to strip us, as it were, of our weapons. Our knowledge and our ability to use that knowledge is her downfall, gentlemen."

"If this place is magical, causing us to see what we expect to see, then if we expect to see Peter —"

"But we must be certain we see the real Peter, and not another apparition created by her," Egon cautioned.

"We know he was with Dr. MacKensie and they thought they were in Africa," Winston recalled. "We don't know what happened to Benny after he disappeared —"

"And which Peter was the real one? The one with Benny and his doppelganger in New Orleans, or the one with Dr. MacKensie?"

"We know it is the latter, Ray. Papa Legba said Benedek was watching shadows of what had passed; therefore, he was witnessing an echo of himself and Peter in New Orleans. Peter did not die in New Orleans, nor did Mr. Benedek; ergo it was all an illusion created by Madame LeBrun." Egon cleared his throat and pushed at his glasses in reflexive habit, waiting for the others' reactions.

"And ergo Peter is with Dr. MacKensie, right?" Winston concluded, slapping a hand on Egon's shoulder.

"Precisely."

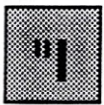
"So now we just have to concentrate on reaching them," Ray added, a spark of his usual enthusiasm bubbling.

"And once we are reunited, we simply convince them to see the truth and I believe Madame LeBrun's power will be too weak to cause us any further problems."

"You're a genius, Spengs!" Ray exclaimed, and his praise caused a sparkle in Egon's blue eyes.

"So what are we waiting for?" Winston demanded.

Egon met his companions' eyes, then nodded and once more consulted his PKE meter. He pointed, and the three men proceeded resolutely onward.



"I could really use a nice tall one right about now," Peter complained, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "It's hotter than New York in August, which is hotter 'n hell."

"Don't think about it, Dr. Venkman," Jonathan advised, as he tried to find enough of his own saliva to swallow. "It only makes the thirst worse." He glanced over at Benny, who was leaning his head against the tree, his eyes closed. "Benedek, how do you feel?"

"Pretty thirsty, Jack, thanks for asking." The journalist's voice lacked his usual flippancy. He opened his eyes and looked tiredly at his companions. "Listen, guys, I'm really sorry I got you into this mess. It's all my fault ..."

"You can say *that* again," Peter muttered.

"That's not quite fair, Dr. Venkman," Jonathan protested in Benny's defense.

"Oh yeah? Ask him who set this whole thing up, and why," Peter argued, glaring at Benny. "Who ticked off the lady in the first place, Benny?"

"What lady?" Jonathan asked, looking truly puzzled.

"Madame LeBrun, Jon-Boy," Benny replied, nodding at Peter. "Haven't you been listening to anything I've said? Pete is one-hundred percent on track. I'm the one who dragged him into her place and nearly got us both killed, and she's out for revenge. She's done her research, boy-o, and knew you'd be the perfect tool."

"She knew you'd call us in," Peter added, rubbing his forehead. "Who else would you call but the Ghostbusters?"

"I hope she hasn't done anything to the others," Benny said worriedly.

"You'd better hope she hasn't, bunky, because then she'll have to get in line behind me and if there's anything left, she can have a turn at you," Peter threatened.

Benny hunched his shoulders and looked away, not trying to defend himself.

"I told the guys we shouldn't have taken the case — that you weren't worth the bother," Peter went on, contempt lacing his tones. "You haven't changed, have you, Edgar? You're still the same miserable —"

"All right, that's enough!" Jonathan exploded. Benny glanced up at him in disbelief, gratitude in his eyes.

Peter gaped. "What are you defending him for? You're only here because of him —"

Jonathan cut in, "I don't doubt that that's true, and once we get back to Georgetown I'll cheerfully put him up against the wall and let you extract his liver, if you like."

"Hey!" Benny objected.

Jonathan ignored him, gaze fixed on the Ghostbuster. "However, as long as we are here, we are in this together, and petty bickering amongst ourselves is not going to help us survive! If your friends are unable to reach us, we're going to need to make serious efforts to find water, food, and shelter. And that means we can't sit here sniping at each other about things which cannot be changed! Do you understand, Dr. Venkman?"

"Yeah," Peter said, eyeing the professor with new respect, "I guess I do."

"Good." Jonathan stood up, stretching his legs. "I'm going to take a little walk – try not to kill one another while I'm gone." He strode off, hoping to walk off his anger before it got the better of him. He'd always been even-tempered except when injustice was being done, but Benedek had managed to bring out the worst in him, moving him to unexpected anger. Benedek could effortlessly make him lose his temper and Venkman was running Benny a close second.

He found a bush and attended to the call of nature, then turned around to find a woman standing before him. He blinked, wondering if he was suffering hallucinations brought on by sunstroke. "Er – hello?"

"Hello, Dr. MacKensie," Madame LeBrun greeted, as she looked him up and down in a way that made him flush. "I'm pleased we have finally met."

"We have? You are?" Jonathan stammered, giving her an uncertain smile. "I'm sorry, but I don't recall –"

"You're Jonathan MacKensie, a special friend of Edgar Benedek's," she said, placing a hand on his arm. "The one man he considers a true friend, the one who is willing to give him the benefit of the doubt."

"Well, I don't know that I'd go so far as all that –"

"You are the one who will give me my revenge."

"What?"

"You are the instrument of his destruction."

"Now just a minute – !"

She twined one arm around his neck and kissed him, silencing his protests.

Jonathan's eyes widened, and he broke away as soon as he was able to, holding her at arms' length. "Look here, I don't know who you are, but I have a pretty good guess, and I can tell you right now that I am not going to help you destroy Benedek or anyone else!" He let go of her and backed away, hoping he didn't look as flustered as he felt. His romantic encounters had usually proceeded a little less impetuously than this – he didn't even know her name! "I'm sorry, I've got to go now," he announced and turned hastily back toward their campsite.

She watched him go, and smiled. "You'll do very well indeed, Dr. MacKensie," she informed his retreating back.



here's just one thing I want to know, Pete," Benny said, as they waited for Jonathan's return.

Peter grunted, not opening his eyes or moving the Yankees' cap he'd pulled down over his face to shade it from the climbing sun.

"Why didn't you ever tell me you blamed my old man for getting your pop in trouble?"

Peter sat up, the baseball cap falling to the ground. "How'd you know *that*?"

"I'm a mind-reader," Benny answered with a lopsided smile. "It sure wasn't from you."

Peter shrugged. "Yeah? So what? It's too late for you to apologize now, Benny."

The journalist laughed. "I wasn't going to apologize – I was just gonna ask you where you got that crazy idea. My old man did a lot of things, but he never conned a friend."

Peter scowled. "Sounds like you didn't know him very well, Benedek."

Benny's expression darkened. "Maybe I didn't. Maybe I spent most of my childhood in an orphanage 'cause he was off trying to make a fortune, or else ..."

"In jail?" Peter finished nastily, when Benny stopped.

Benedek scrambled to his feet and glared down at the Ghostbuster. "Yeah, well, *your* pop ain't exactly an angel. And for the record, it was *his* idea to pull that con they did way back when!"

Peter jumped up and seized the smaller man by his brightly-colored shirtfront. "It wasn't!"

"Get a clue, Venkman — he was in it up to his neck, and he got what was coming to him!"

"Take that back!" Peter advised, balling his fist and shoving it under Benedek's nose.

Benny's blue eyes stared defiantly into his captor's, then he smiled. "I never took anything back when we were kids, and I'm not starting now. Look, V-man, why don't we admit both our fathers were losers, and call it water under the bridge?"

"My dad's not a loser!" Peter shouted, as he punched an astonished Edgar Benedek in the jaw.

"Peter!"

The dark-haired Ghostbuster froze, then let go of his rival with such force that Benny tumbled to the ground and sat, hard, on an exposed tree-root. "Egon, you mighty white hunter you — I *knew* you'd find us!" He whirled and grinned at the trio of tired Ghostbusters who were approaching them.

"I assume this means you're all right, Peter," the physicist observed, as Peter dashed toward them, hooking an arm around Ray's shoulders, and then slapping a high five with Winston.

Not certain whether to rub his jaw or his backside, Benny sat where he was and watched the reunion among the quartet of friends. He really had always thought he and Peter were friends, but the recent revelation as well as Peter's joy at seeing his real friends shot the truth home with a pain as sharp as Peter's tongue. He was probably wrong about Jack, too ...

He had once told Jonathan that people didn't exactly line up to help him out, and it was true. Oh sure, he knew zillions of people and called 'em friends, but when it came down to the nitty-gritty he'd never had anybody who cared about him — until Jonathan happened along.

And what had Jon gotten for his troubles? Nothing but aggravation, heartburn and twisted ankles.

Did Benny ever really say thanks? No, of course not. He just kept pushing, irritating both Jonathan and Dr. Moorhouse, putting Jonathan's life in danger. And for what? Another sensationalistic headline, another few bucks in the bank, a little more flash-in-the-pan fame. Maybe Madame LeBrun had done them all a favor ...

"Where's Dr. MacKensie?" Egon inquired, offering Benny a hand up.

"He took a walk to cool his jets," Peter said, one arm still draped around Ray's shoulders.

"Was that wise, under the circumstances?" Egon asked, frowning at Peter.

"Probably not," Benny agreed, dusting off his rear end. "But tempers were getting a little out of hand, and I think it was either take a hike or kill someone — me, most likely."

"I can understand that," Egon murmured, meeting Peter's gaze. "I think it would be prudent for us to locate the professor as quickly as possible, before Madame LeBrun finds him."

"If she hasn't already gotten her mitts on him," Benny said, shading his eyes with one hand and scanning the horizon. "He should have been back by now — it doesn't take Jonny long to cool off."

"Which way did he go?" asked Ray.

"That way," Benny indicated, after a few seconds. He pointed east, then gave his shoulders a hitch. "I'll go find him."

"He went *that* way," Peter dissented, pointing west. The two men glared at each other, while their companions exchanged glances.

"No problem, guys," Winston finally interjected. "I'll go with Benedek, and you guys can check out the other direction, just in case. First one to find Dr. MacKensie, give a shout."

Egon and Ray were nodding, and Peter shrugged as if it didn't matter to him one little bit.

The group split up, heading out on their searches.



Jonathan stumbled to a halt and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He was fairly certain it hadn't taken him

this long to walk from the tree — why was it taking so much longer to walk back to it? But then, he'd never had a fine-tuned sense of direction, and had been known to get lost before. But being lost in a North American forest was one thing, a mere aggravation. Here, it could be his death.

He glanced up at the sun, realizing that midday was nearly upon him. He had to find some sort of shade before he collapsed. "Mustn't panic," he muttered to himself, his 'mantra' since meeting Benedek. And why hadn't he retrieved his sun glasses from his suit jacket pocket before storming off?

"Those two idiots, arguing like — like school boys," he said to no one in particular, shaking his head. "Maybe they're used to this sort of thing, but I'm a professor of anthropology, despite what Dr. Moorhouse has tried to turn me into, and being zapped into another dimension by a voodoo priestess isn't normal! I just want to go home, take a nice shower, drink a gallon of tea and crawl into bed."

Realizing he was beginning to babble, Jonathan paused and rubbed his eyes. "Perhaps I should just stand here and shout for him, rather than waste my energy wandering around," he told himself, blinking at the wavering horizon. "*Benedek! Benedek!*"



Winston paused, one hand upraised. "Hear something?"

"Sounds like one lost little anthro prof," Benny observed, grinning, "and it's coming from over there." He raised his voice and hollered back, "*Hang on, Jack! I'll save ya, buds!*"

Winston watched the journalist break into a jog in the appropriate direction, then hurried to keep up with him. He'd wait until MacKensie was in sight before shouting for the others.

"Jon? Yo, Jonny! Send up a smoke signal or something, will ya? Come on, Jungle Jack, give me a clue!" Benny shouted, hands cupped around his mouth like a megaphone. He waited a moment, ears perked, but there was no reply. "Jonny!"

"Benny, m'man, are you sure this is the right way?" Winston puffed, catching up to the slighter man.

Hands pressed to the front of his thighs, Benny stooped over and sucked in air. "I'm sure," he said, once he'd gotten some breath back. "If anybody can find the wandering prof, it's Edgar Benedek. Jonny's always said it's like he's got a built-in homing beacon I can zero in on no matter where he goes."

"Kinda like a bad penny always turns up?"

Turning his head, Benny met Winston's grin. "That's Doctor M's version," he admitted, straightening up. "See that lump? That's our boy."

Shading his eyes, Winston followed Benny's pointing finger. "Well, it could be a body," the Ghostbuster agreed.

"It's Jonny," Benny insisted, starting off once more.

Winston hesitated a moment, then pulled his thrower and shot a proton blast into the air before following Benedek.

It seemed to be at least an hour before Benny reached Jonathan's side, pushing the professor onto his back. "Jonny? Wake-up call, pal. J.J., don't force me to lug a dead prof back to Dr. M — she'll cancel the expense account. Man, I wish we had some water," Benny muttered to Winston who was kneeling on one knee across from the journalist.

"W-water?" Jonathan croaked, grasping Benny's hand.

"Thataboy, J.J.," Benny cried gleefully, putting one arm around Jonathan's shoulder to help him sit up.

"Water?" the professor repeated hopefully, managing to open his eyes and trying to focus on his rescuers.

"Sorry, m'man," Winston apologized, patting his jumpsuit pockets. "Here, try this," he suggested, offering a lollipop which had somehow escaped Slimer's attention.

Benny pulled off the wrapper and stuck the candy into Jonathan's mouth. "See if that puts some power in your pucker, boy-o."

After a few moments Jonathan managed to work up enough saliva to moisten his parched mouth. "Grape?"

"Hey pal, don't look a gift sucker in the mouth," Benny chided him, his fingers tightening on Jonathan's shoulder. "It's better than nothing, isn't it?"

"Thank you," Jonathan mumbled around the lollipop stick, glancing at Winston. He removed the candy and inquired, "Is Peter all right?"

"Yeah, he's back with his buds," Benny said. "They caught up with him, just like he said they would." Something flickered in his eyes, quickly veiled as he changed the subject. "So, you think we can get you on your feet now, Jonny?"

"Yes, if you'll just help me up –" He stopped, and the others turned to see what he was staring at. "You again?"

Madame LeBrun stood with her arms folded, watching the three men with a superior expression. "This is a very touching scene, gentlemen," she informed them. "But perhaps it is time to dispense with the games. You wish to know why I have brought you here, do you not?"

The trio looked at each other, then Winston stood up, placing himself between the woman and his companions. "I'd say that was pretty high on our list, ma'am."

"Who is this woman?" Jonathan asked, realizing he hadn't hallucinated her after all. "Benedek, do you know her?"

"Oh yes," she affirmed, as Benny opened his mouth. "We are acquainted. I am Madame LeBrun, Dr. MacKensie, and I have a proposition for you."

"Uh – me?"

She nodded, sidestepping Winston and standing directly in front of Jonathan. "There are six of you here. I only need one of you to stay behind, and the rest will be free to go."

Benny cast an uneasy glance at Jonathan, whose jaw was hanging open a little as he stared at the priestess, and he replied hastily, "Right, then it'll be *me*! I'm the one responsible for all of this happening, so I'll just –"

"I don't *want* you, Mr. Benedek," she said silkily. "I want *him*."

"But Jack didn't do anything to you!" he argued desperately. "I'm the one who wrote that story and broke into your house – I'm the one who's got to be punished –"

"You *will* be, Mr. Benedek." She met his gaze, smiling at his expression.

"But – why me?" Jonathan at last found his voice to ask.

"Because you are his friend." She pointed at the dumbfounded Benny and added calmly, "He will return to his own world and his life, but he will be unable to forget that he has lost his best friend, and that he has been the reason for this loss. He will live with that guilt forever."

Jonathan and Benny's eyes met, and the journalist shook his head. "Jack, no! You can't do it! It's not your decision."

The professor's voice was quiet. "If not *mine*, then whose, Benny?"

"You don't have to do this, man," Winston objected, his thrower aimed at Madame LeBrun.

"Yes, I believe I do, Mr. Zeddemore," Jonathan countered softly, glancing at Madame LeBrun. "No point in risking six lives when one will do."

"You got it, Jack, but the one life is gonna be mine," Benny said firmly, glaring at the priestess.

"I have chosen this one," she asserted, flashing a deadly smile and holding out a hand to Jonathan. "Your punishment begins now, Edgar Benedek. You shall be witness to his life draining away."

"No!"

Jonathan's body jerked upright, his head thrown back and his eyes wide open as he looked skyward. His limbs stiffened and his jaw went slack, the color slowly fading from his face.

"Jon!" Benny shouted, trying to throw himself at the priestess. A spark flew from her hand, catching Benny in the chest and slamming him to the ground behind Winston. Gasping for breath, Benny struggled to his knees only to be knocked down by another lightning bolt.

Powering up his proton pack, Winston aimed his thrower at the woman but he hesitated. "Don't make me neutronize you, lady," he growled in warning.

Smiling at his threat, Madame LeBrun waved her hands and the air was filled with screaming winged creatures dive-bombing the Ghostbuster.

Dropping to one knee and bracing the thrower against the other, Winston valiantly tried to blast the bat-like beasts but there were too many of them.

"Yeee-haaw!" came Ray Stantz's battlecry as his proton beam joined Winston's and the black Ghostbuster rose up from the ground, filled with renewed determination.

"Get 'em, Tex!" Peter encouraged, leaping into the fray to pull Benny behind the armed Ghostbusters.

Egon, a grim set to his jaw, took a position on Winston's other side and proceeded to bag a creature. "Trap out, Peter!" he cried, and Venkman grabbed a trap from Spengler's belt and threw it out.

With a practiced kick, the psychologist sent the shoebox-sized device sliding along the ground until it was positioned under the bat-winged, serpent-tailed monkey. "Got it!" he called, slamming his bootheel down on the pedal on the ghost-trap's extension cord. The black-and-yellow doors opened, releasing a bright white light which pulled the creature down inside the trap, and the doors slammed shut upon it.

Ray and Winston had two entities captured together in their proton-streams, and Peter didn't wait for his cue, as he tossed another trap under the pair and opened it.

"I could use some help here, Benny," he said, shoving an empty trap into the reporter's hands. "Just slide it out, stomp on the release trigger and let it go when the trap's got them."

Benedek looked down at the trap, then nodded and obeyed Peter's instructions, soon trapping Egon's current prey. The remaining monkeys had withdrawn to a safer distance, chittering at their attackers, and Benny tugged on Peter's sleeve. "We've gotta stop her, V-man — she's killing Jon!"

The chief Ghostbuster followed Benny's pointing finger, then shouted to his partners, "Cover me!" With that, he sandbagged Madame LeBrun from the rear, tackling her and taking her to the ground.

Jonathan gasped and went limp, freed at last from her energy-drainage. Benny scuttled to his side, while Winston hurried to help Peter with the irate voodoo priestess.

"I will kill you *all*!" she threatened, as they hauled her to her feet.

"No." They looked up in astonishment as another woman appeared. She wore a gown decorated with shards of mirrors, and her long raven hair was braided with multi-colored ribbons. "No one will die. You have misused the power of voodoo, Madame."

"My lady," the priestess whispered, causing Winston and Peter to look at her curiously. "I am your devoted servant —"

"You are the servant of jealousy and revenge, but not of love. There is no love in your heart, only bitterness and hatred."

"Santera," Winston whispered, and the loa turned her gaze on him.

"Ah, Winston Zeddemore," she said, smiling at him.

"You — you know me?" Winston demanded, gripping his thrower and looking at her suspiciously.

"You may put away your weapons — all of you," she invited, waving a hand at the Ghostbusters. "I mean you no harm."

"Oh yeah? Well, try telling MacKensie that," Peter snapped, pointing at the unconscious Jonathan. "Your little handmaiden there did a number on him." He jerked his head at Egon, and together they walked toward the two paranormal investigators. Ray immediately took Peter's place by Madame LeBrun's side as her guard.

"Come on, Jack, wake up," Benny pleaded, Jonathan's head in his lap. "You can't do this to me, pal. You can't leave me to face Dr. M to tell her you've gone to that big Anthropology Lab in the Sky, Jon-boy. I need you — you're the only

conscience I've got, and Peter will be the first to tell you that's a big job."

Holstering his thrower, Egon knelt beside Jonathan and pressed his fingers just under the man's ear. After a moment, he looked up and met Benny's anxious gaze. "I'm sorry, Benny," Spengler began solemnly, a grave look in his blue eyes.

"Jonny's not dead," Benny denied firmly, looking down at the deathly-still face. "C'mon, Smilin' Jack, show Egon he's mistaken."

"Are you?" Peter asked Egon, and the physicist shook his head. Taking a deep breath, the psychologist grasped Benny by the shoulders. "It's over, Benny — I'm sorry," he said as Egon gently shifted Jonathan from Benny's lap to the ground.

"It's not over 'til the fat lady sings," Benny announced, pulling free of Peter's grasp and going up to Santera. "Exchange us," he demanded, blue eyes flashing.

"I do not under —"

"Read my lips, sister. Give Jonny back his life and take mine. I'm the one responsible for all this — Jack had nothing to do with it. It's not fair to make him pay with his life for my stupidity."

"You believe I have this power?" Santera asked gently.

"Hey, you're the loa of love. You've gotta make it right," Benny added, swallowing hard.

"No, you cannot — !" the voodoo priestess screamed, trying to throw herself at Santera but held back by Ray and Winston.

The loa looked at Madame LeBrun and her features hardened for a moment. "You have done much damage in my name," she pronounced, eyes lighting with a strange glow. "Your hatred is no match for the love these men have for each other; no match for brotherhood."

Benny and the Ghostbusters watched in amazement as the loa seemed to float over to Jonathan and her image superimposed itself over his. While they continued to stare as if frozen in time, Jonathan's chest began to rise and fall and color flooded his cheeks.

Then Santera departed, and Jonathan's eyes fluttered open.

"Jonathan?" Benny asked in disbelief, helping his friend sit up. "You okay, buds?"

"What happened?" mumbled the professor. Then his eyes focused on Benedek. "You called me Jonathan!"

"It's your name, ain't it, St. Jon? How do you feel, bucky? No chimes ringing in your ears?"

Jonathan rubbed his head. "I must have passed out. I had the oddest dream. I was surrounded by mist — and an old man with a cane gave me a glass of ice tea ..." He trailed off, his brows knitted as he tried to recapture an elusive memory.

"Looks like you were mistaken, after all, Spengs," Peter observed, grinning at the physicist, who was eyeing their clients with a dubious expression.

"Indeed." Egon raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Most extraordinary. Dr. MacKensie, I think I should inform you that you were clinically dead for nearly five minutes."

"De-dead?"

Benny grinned at the look on his partner's face, and gripped his shoulder reassuringly. "That was some Lazarus act, Jack. I bet you weren't dreaming, after all, just having an OBE!"

"NDE," Egon amended with his customary precision. "And I would venture to say you are correct, Mr. Benedek."

Benny nodded, then looked up at the loa. "Thanks, ma'am. I owe you one. Do you want me to go with you now?"

"Benedek!" Jonathan objected.

Santera shook her head. "It is not required. You will respect the secrets of voodoo in the future, will you not?"

"Yes ma'am," he vowed, looking subdued. "I'm sorry."

"The seeker of truth," she commented, smiling at him. She met Jonathan's bemused gaze and added, "The hero."

"I'm not —" he began, stopping as Benny shushed him.

"A formidable combination," Santera continued. "As are you four," she told the Ghostbusters, allowing her gaze to rest in turn on Egon, Ray, Winston and Peter. "The scientist, the idealist, the warrior, the leader. I am sorry you have been brought here against your wills. Now, it is time to deal with this one." She approached Madame LeBrun, who sank to her knees before the loa.

Santera gestured, and the flock of nether-entities the priestess had summoned dove at her with ear-piercing shrieks. Another gesture, and Madame LeBrun vanished, her screams echoing behind her. Santera smiled once more and faded slowly away.

The six men stared at each other in astonishment. "Oh, man," Winston sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. "Now what happens?"

"Now," said Papa Legba, "it is time for you to leave." He stood behind them, leaning on his cane as they turned and gaped at him. He straightened up and waved the walking stick, sketching a rectangular opening in the air. A glowing mist filled the opening, and the Ghostbusters exchanged glances, recognizing a dimensional gateway.

One by one they filed through it, vanishing as soon as they stepped into the mist. Benny had an arm around Jonathan's waist, supporting the unsteady professor. Winston, the last to go, paused and nodded at the Gatekeeper. "Thank you, sir." Then he too was on his way, tumbling through darkness to land on the grass of the Georgetown campus.

"Whoa! That was some trip!" Benny exclaimed, grinning at the still-befuddled Jonathan. "Ya okay, Jonny? A little unsteady on your feet, aren't ya? Wait 'til Dr. M hears about this! She's gonna wet her pants!"

"Hope I'm not around," Peter muttered with a shudder.

"No, she won't, because you're not going to tell her!" Jonathan protested, clutching Benny's arm.

"Knowing the redoubtable Dr. Moorhouse," Spengler spoke up, "you will have to tell her

something, and I have found the truth is an excellent purgative."

"Besides, you have to explain the Ramapithecus, don't you?" Ray added helpfully.

Jonathan moaned and slapped a hand to his forehead. "I forgot all about that —"

"I believe it was just another of Madame LeBrun's creations, designed to entrap you and thus draw Benedek into her web," Egon expounded, shifting the trap he held. "I believe we should confine these in the portable containment unit — this trap appears to be malfunctioning."

"What? How can — the readout says it's empty," Peter said, stooping over to squint at the trap Egon held.

"So does this one," Ray said, holding up his trap.

"Same here, homeboy."

"How can they all be empty? We trapped those critters!" Peter exclaimed, checking the traps his partners held.

"Hmm."

"What 'hmmm', Egon? Explain 'hmmm'," Venkman demanded, whirling on the physicist.

"Apparently they did not belong in this dimension and remained behind when we came through. I'm not certain how that is possible. Fascinating," Egon murmured, looking thoughtful.

"So long as they don't come knocking on our door, I don't care how it happened," Peter declared, hooking the empty trap on his belt. "Wonder what happened to my pack?"

"Benny was carrying it, but it got lost somewhere along the way," Ray explained, looking around the area.

"Oh yeah? How come you guys kept yours, anyway? Mine never made it through the door," Peter complained.

"Egon theorized it was because we made a conscious effort to hang on to ours and you fell through the doorway," Ray said in a comforting

tone. "Benny was carrying it, but he lost it when he went through the doorway."

"So there's a proton pack wandering around somewhere? Great," Peter snorted in disgust.

"Hey, Pete, does this look familiar?" Winston asked, holding up a proton pack. "I found it in these bushes."

"It's Ol' Betsey!" Peter cried, examining the pack.

"Found this, too," Winston said, picking up the rolled chart that had once held the drawing of Ramapithecus.

Benny snatched it and unrolled it, then showed it to Jonathan. "Hey, it's back, big as life and twice as ugly. Whaddya know, huh?"

Egon held his PKE meter near the chart, then nodded. "Very faint residual traces of psychic energy. I would say this chart is no longer enchanted, gentlemen."

"Isn't this great? We're all back, safe and sound," Ray proclaimed happily.

"Reasonably safe and sound, Raymond. I believe we could all do with some food and rest, however," Egon pointed out.

"Yeah, can we go home now?" Peter whined.

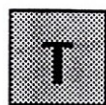
"Let's go get some pizza, courtesy of the Institute," Benny suggested expansively. "It's the least we can do, J.J." he added when Jonathan started to protest.

"I was thinking of something a little more substantial than pizza," Jonathan corrected, looking at the Ghostbusters. He smiled at the clamor of approval and agreement, then clapped a hand on Benny's shoulder. "And we'll put it on *your* charge card, Benedek."

Benny considered, then grinned at Jonathan. "Why not? I'll charge it to the *Register* — after all, Jordy's gonna sell extra copies when this story hits the stands."

Jonathan's jaw dropped. "You can't —!"

"Hey, boy-o, this will knock Elvis sightings off the front page!"



Twenty minutes later the group was gathered around a table at an all-night coffeeshop near the Ghostbusters' motel. Jonathan looked up as Benny came back from the pay-phone. "Well?"

"Jordy says dimensional travel isn't hot right now." Benny sighed and dropped into his chair.

"Thank Heaven for small favors," muttered Jonathan.

"I'll try pitching it again tomorrow when he's awake."

The professor glared at him, then frowned in puzzlement. "Benedek, why did you offer to stay behind in my place?"

Benny tried to shrug the question off. "Self-preservation, Jack. I didn't want to be the one to tell Dr. M I'd lost you." He stopped stirring salt into his cola and added, with a crooked grin, "Besides, you've got too many people who'd miss you — all those students, not to mention the coeds ..."

"You've got a lot of friends, too, Benny," Jonathan broke in. "I mean, look at all those people who attended your funeral! Your wall feeler friend, Miss Lacey, was there all the way from Liverpool. Hortense and Zabbo even sent flowers ... and Dr. Moorhouse accompanied me. Ms. Malloy performed an, uh, interesting dance —"

"Yeah, it was a great funeral," Benny said, hastily explaining, "I had Boom-Boom videotape it for me." His fond grin faded, and he added quietly, "It's just not the same, Jonny. I mean — there's friends, and then there's *friends*." His gaze wandered over the Ghostbusters, who were talking quietly among themselves. "I've got a million acquaintances, but *friends* ... Not so many of them." He met Jonathan's eyes. "You're my best one, Jack."

"Same here, Benny."

Egon elbowed Peter, who cleared his throat. "Uh, Benny, I'm sorry for that little fight we had."

"Me, too, Pete. I had it coming."

Jonathan looked from Benedek to Venkman, then shook his head and raised his glass of ice tea. "A toast, gentlemen. To friendship."

"Friendship," the others chorused, clinking their various beverage glasses together.



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Call for Papers



"So."

Steel turned and levelled Silver with an ominous glare. The technician smiled ingratiatingly at him, just a hint of mischief in his eyes. Impassively, Steel shifted his attention away from the tall, thin well-dressed man beside him.

"You're not going to tell me about it," Silver said after Steel continued to ignore him. Silver fiddled with his tie, adjusting the knot carefully, before smoothing down the lapels of his exquisitely cut suit jacket.

"Tell you about what?" Steel demanded.

"This project of Sapphire's." Silver tugged fastidiously at his cuffs, studiously pretending that Steel's reaction didn't matter.

"What's to tell?" Steel sniffed, raising a critical eyebrow toward Silver's sartorial adjustments.

"Sounds rather interesting, I thought. Wouldn't mind attending, myself," Silver suggested, rubbing his hands together.

"You would."

Silver glanced over at Steel and lifted an elegantly curved eyebrow. "You won't."

"It's all rather ... human," Steel answered with a weary sigh.

"Ah. And you don't like things human. Pity. They can be quite fascinating creatures. Such elaborate scheming. They make whole industries of it."

"What?"

"Defying Time. They're ... obsessed with it, in a way. Even their literature."

"Oh, yes."

"I quite like that Wells fellow. Of course, he had it all wrong. But such imagination!"

"I haven't time for imagination," Steel told him flatly.

"Yes, I can see that," Silver observed innocently.

"These humans ... they're more your style. Frivolous. Ephemeral."

"Charismatic, ingenious —"

"Annoying."

"Ah," Silver remarked as though Steel's comment explained everything.

"Oh?"

"Well, Sapphire's quite taken with the idea. Has some merit, I understand. Powers That Be are behind it. Humanity has a tremendous future ahead of it, if it doesn't go astray."

"Many different futures. I really couldn't care which one they follow," Steel dismissed.

"Oh, I don't know. I rather find the one where they live mostly under the ocean rather entertaining. Bit violent at times. But truly intriguing."

"You are easily entertained," retorted Steel.

"And of course, there's the one where they battle an alien species in space — quite frightening, really. Totally alien."

"Which one is that?"

"Unemotional creatures called 'Chigs', I believe. And of course, the AIs — artificial intelligences."

"When dealing with humans, any intelligence is purely imaginary and certainly artificial."

"What about the future where they don't know the enemy? They live in some sort of space station with creatures of many different races. Sort of a cultural potpourri. This enemy is some kind of being of darkness, I understand. Quite, quite lethal, and devious in the extreme. More your

line, I think?" Silver suggested with a ghost of a grin.

"You know, you can be quite tedious without any effort at all. But then, I imagine you've heard that before," Steel parried.

"Oh, perhaps. But then, that's not what Sapphire says. I rather take her opinion seriously, don't you?"

Steel merely levelled him with a glare, then turned away without a word.

Silver's grin spread across his face, lighting his eyes with delight. "Then there's the one where they all end up living in stations orbiting their home planet. Pity that — it's such a lovely little world now. But the new planet they discover — now, that's interesting! Humans need to interact more with other intelligent species. Might teach them a few things."

"Like humility? Hasn't done you any good."

"Ah, but then I'm not human, am I? And I am the best in my field."

"Are you, indeed?"

"Oh, yes." Silver paused a moment, studying Steel's immobile profile. "What about you?"

"Me?"

"See you there, shall I?"

"Where?"

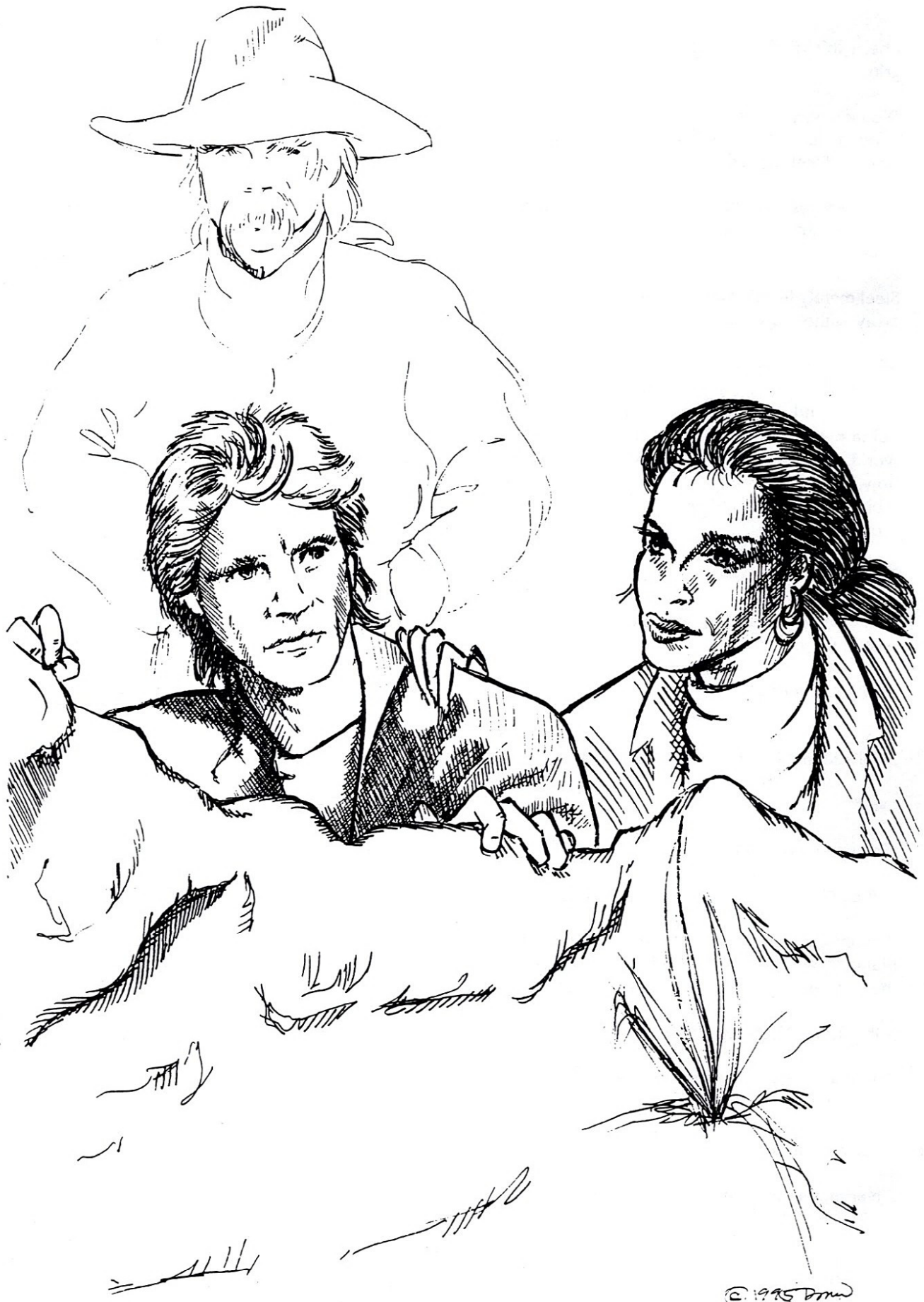
"Sapphire's conference. The one she's been planning with all the telepaths and such among the humans. The one we've been discussing."

"Oh. That. You're going?"

"Wouldn't miss it. After all, Sapphire *is* the hostess."

"Yes, well, in that case, perhaps you will."

Silver merely grinned knowingly.





Return to Serenity

by Kathryn A. Sullivan



*Author's Note: This story is set in the fall of 1993, a year after the **MacGyver** episode "The Stringer" and a year after the events in "Playing With Fire" in **The Manifest** #1.*

His surroundings slowly solidified around him: a hitching post off to his right, a step up to a wooden walkway before his boots, and a whuffling presence behind him that must be his horse. On a deeper level, he recognized the elements and relaxed into the situation, wondering what friends he would find mirrored in Old West personas this time.

Since the general store was now before him, he stepped up onto the walkway and entered. The clerk, an unfamiliar dark-haired man, hurried up to him. "Can I help you with something, Mister —"

"Name's MacGyver —" he started.

"No, not again!" a voice yelped. Mac stared aghast as a grayish shape seemed to step out of him, then turned to face him. The unkempt beard and bushy mustache were almost hidden in the grayness beneath the battered cowboy hat, but, as the shape straightened to look him in the eye, Mac almost backed a step. The shape had his face!

Almost his face, Mac quickly corrected himself. The eyebrows were bushier, and the glaring eyes were narrower and had more crow's-feet around them than MacGyver remembered from his mirror. "Do I know you?" Mac started, but the shape wasn't listening.

"You're not taking over this dream again! My name's Mclver, and you're going to listen to *me* for once!"

Mac snapped awake. Recognizing his living room about him and the couch beneath him, he stared at the ceiling and waited for his breathing to

return to normal. What a weird dream. He'd chalk it up to one too many times of falling asleep watching Westerns, if it wasn't for the fact that he hadn't even had the TV on. And, with his latest projects, he had been far too busy to even watch a Western, let alone get enough sleep.

He was still staring upward when a small dark shape abruptly appeared in midair, hovered only a moment and then dropped to smack into his chest. He looked downward cautiously, half expecting some new "toy" of Murdoc's. Instead, what he found was far worse. Resting innocently on his chest was a wooden-handled pocket knife. Either the same pocket knife he had sent to Laura Wingate and which still should be in the Parapsychology Department at McGill University or one very close to it. He reached out slowly and turned the knife over, revealing the bullet embedded in the wood. "Aw, man ..."



ntent on the computer screen before her, Professor Laura Wingate reached out blindly as the phone rang and snagged it on the third ring. "This is —"

"Laura!" the voice on the other end interrupted.

"Mac!" Smiling as she leaned back from the screen, she unclipped the ornate earring resting against the receiver. Her gaze fell upon the carved storystick hanging on the nearest wall, a souvenir of their first meeting back when MacGyver was a field operative in an intelligence agency known as the DXS, and her smile widened. She hadn't heard from her friend since he had resigned from the Phoenix Foundation. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Do you still have that pocket knife I sent you?"

Laura frowned. Mac's voice sounded strained. "Yeah, just a moment." Pushing her chair back from the computer, she wheeled over to her filing cabinet and opened a drawer. She lifted the lid of the wooden silk-lined box where the department kept objects suspected of being psychically active and hesitated. "Just a moment, Mac." She glanced again at the empty imprint in the silk where the knife had rested, then put the receiver down and started over toward the second desk in the large office.

Professor J.J. Stillman, the other faculty member of the Department of Parapsychology and owner of

the second desk, chose that moment to enter, briefcase in hand. He caught up the motorcycle helmet from atop his filing cabinet. "Well, I'm outta here." Taller than his older colleague, he still might have been mistaken for a student, despite the tie he wore with his dark leather jacket.

Laura stopped in the center of the large office/classroom. "J.J., are you running any tests on the knife my friend sent me?"

The dark-haired man hesitated, confusion on his boyish face. "That apport from last year? No, why?"

"It's gone."

"You're sure? I don't think Celia would have —"

Laura merely gestured at the open drawer as she returned up the short flight of steps to her desk and the waiting receiver. "Mac, I don't know how to explain it — I know I saw it only last week —"

She heard a heartfelt sigh through the line. "It just turned up here, Laura."

"Turned up how, Mac?" She had a creeping feeling she already knew the answer. Across the office, J.J. raised his eyebrows and walked closer.

"Turned up as in dropping suddenly out of midair." MacGyver hesitated, and she was almost surprised at the sheepish note in his voice when he continued, "There've been a few other ... 'things' appearing. I'm sorry I didn't mention them sooner. Do you want me to come there or are you coming here?"

"Have these 'things' been appearing at the same location or just wherever you are?"

"Uh ... wherever I've been."

"You come here, then. And bring all of these 'things', you hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How soon will you be here?"

There was a pause from the other end. "I just need to finish wrapping up this project — probably by the end of the week."

Laura tried to think of the best words to convince her skeptical friend. "Mac, try and wrap it up faster. You might be in danger."

She half-expected him to laugh off the warning, but instead he replied, "Well, he did sound a bit upset. Talk to you later, Laura."

"He?" Laura repeated, but the connection had already been broken. She frowned at the receiver.

"He, who?" J.J. prodded.

Laura shook her head. "I guess we'll find out when Mac gets here." She eyed her colleague. Even after four years on the faculty, J.J. still managed to project an air of innocent bewilderment, which was excellent camouflage for his former occupation as a psychiatrist. Lately though, he seemed to think of himself as a detective — namely Sherlock Holmes — able to discern within moments everything about a person. She wondered what he would make of Mac, especially given MacGyver's former occupations of intelligence agent and, until recently, trouble-shooter for a research institute that negotiated peace treaties as readily as conducting environmental impact studies.

J.J. glanced at the imprint in the silk. "If an apport's involved, he'll be here sooner than he plans."

Laura pursed her lips thoughtfully as she slowly lowered the wooden lid and slid the drawer closed. Oh, she was definitely going to enjoy J.J.'s and Mac's meeting. But who, or what, could be sending MacGyver an apport? "If it was anyone else, I'd agree. But you can't push Mac. Not if he realizes he's being pushed. Don't get me wrong, once MacGyver knows the full story of whatever is wanted of him, he'll help. But dropping things on him is going to get his stubborn streak up."

Despite Laura's prediction, J.J. was surprised as the days of the week went by and her friend did not appear. But, since Laura was not bringing up her accurate reading of her friend, he did not comment on the fact that her long reddish hair had now returned to its natural black or on her rearranging of the tribal masks, wall hangings and the other cultural artifacts on the shelves around the large classroom/office. On Friday, he entered the office after his last class of the day and found

a lanky, sandy-haired stranger napping on one of the couches. The man appeared to be a bit older than J.J., but could easily have passed as one of the university's non-traditional students, especially with his casual attire and longish hair. The purple and black travel bag at the foot of the couch, however, did not resemble either a backpack or a briefcase.

After a glance at the clock next to the office's double doors, J.J. calculated that Laura should be returning to the office within minutes. Deciding to leave the handling of her sleeping friend to her, he sat down at his desk to clear up the day's paperwork while he waited. He glanced again at the travel bag and, half-remembering Laura's instructions to her friend, took down a few pieces of equipment from the shelves around his desk and set them up. Then he returned to his paperwork.

Before too long, however, J.J. felt that he was being watched. Glancing quickly up at the empty doorway and then the clock beside it, he merely waved before returning his attention to the last paragraph of the student's paper. "Laura should be here in another minute. There's coffee by the sleep lab door, if you're interested."

There was no response. J.J. looked up as he finished marking the paper, but to all appearances the couch's occupant was sound asleep. And yet J.J. still felt that sensation of being watched. He glanced at the travel bag, suddenly aware of something different about its position. And hadn't it been closed the last he had looked?

Still watching the nylon bag, he eased his chair over to the instruments he had set out. What he saw there caught his attention immediately. The static electrical levels had jumped 23 per cent, while the temperature –

"Brrr. J.J., has maintenance turned on the air conditioning or has the dean decided to save money on heating?" Halfway down the steps inside the office doors, Laura stopped as he waved a warning and gestured at the travel bag. Catching sight of the couch and its waking occupant instead, she grinned broadly and continued on her way to her own desk. "J.J., I'd like you to meet MacGyver, an old friend of mine."

J.J. raised the hand not holding the printouts. "Hi. Laura said you 'fell' in on her when she was researching the creation myths of the tribes in Siberut?"

"From the sky," Laura clarified. "Spectacular landing. I'd say maybe a 4.8."

MacGyver rubbed his eyes, sleep grogginess still in his voice as he complained, "I told you, Laura, I jumped off a short cliff into the lake. I was being chased by –" he glanced at Laura's wide grin and an answering smile replaced his defensiveness – "never mind."

J.J. stifled his disappointment. He had been hoping for a brief glimpse into his colleague's sometimes mysterious past and now MacGyver was proving to be as evasive as Wingate. He glanced at the slim, casually dressed professor and could tell from the sparkle in her dark eyes that she knew he had been "fishing" as well.

The sandy-haired man swung his feet off the end of the blue rattan couch and sat up. He looked thoughtfully at the travel bag by his feet, and J.J. glanced hurriedly at the instruments. The temperature was slowly returning to normal, but the other readings were not.

Laura dropped her briefcase atop her desk and turned to face her friend. "So, Mac, are you going to explain who 'he' is?"

MacGyver was still frowning at the purple and black bag. "I could have sworn –"

"And you'd be right," J.J. agreed. "Laura, look at these."

As she started toward his desk and the sheaf of readings he was holding out, J.J. continued, "When I came in here, that bag was at the foot of the couch. Now, I didn't touch it, but it's moved. Laura, you felt the cold when you entered –"

Laura quickly scanned the printouts. "Did you sense a presence?" she asked softly, her back toward her friend.

J.J. nodded. She sighed and put the measurements down. "He's not going to like this."

"What? What cold?" MacGyver was on his feet. He stepped cautiously around the travel bag,

almost as if he expected it to suddenly move and trip him, and J.J. wondered what it had been doing on his journey here. The blond looked at the instruments atop J.J.'s desk with a trained eye. "You've had a temperature drop, but a rise in static electricity – what's this? Ozone levels? Magnetic activity?" He turned to Laura. "Are you trying to tell me that a *ghost* has been dropping things on me?"

Laura smiled brightly at him. "Sure looks that way. We don't usually get such a strong reading from an apport, but you haven't told me yet how many 'things' you've brought with you." She leaned against the desk. "So, who's the mysterious 'he' who 'seemed a bit upset'? Have you seen anything more of him?"

He hesitated. "Well ..."

J.J. couldn't miss the man's reluctance. He decided to try a different approach from Laura's. "Have you been having trouble sleeping?"

MacGyver followed his glance at the couch. "No. No, not that. Had a late night wrapping things up and an early flight out." He took a deep breath, then glanced again at the printouts and seemed to draw strength from those. "I've been having a problem with mirrors."

"Mirrors?" Laura repeated, her eyebrows lifting.

"Yeah." He shrugged, still looking down at the recordings. "He looks sorta like me, Laura. But with a mustache and a cowboy hat ..."

Laura opened her mouth and closed it again when J.J. shook his head at her.

MacGyver continued, unaware of the exchange, "Anyhow, if the light's bad ... just for a second, I can see him, instead of me."

"And he's the one who gave you all of these ... 'things'?" J.J. asked, sensing that MacGyver was more comfortable with the nontechnical term.

"No, only one of them. Just the knife. The others – here, let me show you. They don't seem connected with him at all." Returning to the couch, he rummaged around in the opened bag and put three items atop the small table before the couches: a wooden-handled pocket knife, a

circular Native American pendant on a cord, and another necklace that seemed mostly chain.

Laura made a small sound of surprise mixed with awe. "Definitely not the average apport. I've heard of stones, teeth, and jewels, but these –!" Using only the lightest touch of one fingertip, she checked both sides of the Native American pendant. J.J. could see where something – perhaps a large feather – had been removed, leaving only a fuzzy down feather several shades darker than her skin. "This looks a bit worse for wear."

MacGyver looked sheepish. "Yeah. The feather I used as a cotter pin to stop a bomb. But this –" Lifting up the other necklace, he held out a metal tube attached on both decorated ends to a chain. "I remember turning this into a dog whistle."

"A dog whistle?" J.J. repeated. "How –"

Laura waved him silent, and Mac continued. "And yet, when I found it in my pocket, it looked like this."

"It's not a dog whistle now," Laura commented. "What is it?"

"The king's amulet," Mac answered absently, turning the tube in his hands. He shook his head. "It's back the way it was when Arthur gave it to me."

"Arthur?" J.J. felt his jaw drop. "You don't mean ... as in 'King ...' As in the 'knights of the round table' King?"

Mac shrugged, looking embarrassed. "They said so. I wasn't too impressed with the knights – they took everything so seriously –"

J.J. stood up. "This is impossible. You've been given apports from three different time periods –"

"I think Standing Wolf might be from around the same time period as ... what's his name," Mac inserted thoughtfully. "Maybe about thirty years difference."

"– three different cultures –" J.J. gestured at the tabletop. "What is the connection?"

"I think that's what Mac is here to find out," Laura said calmly. "Now, Mac, when you first sent me

the knife, all you told me was that it had saved your life in a dream and when you woke up, it was on the floor beside you."

J.J. looked again at the bullet embedded in the wooden handle. He hadn't remembered hearing that portion. "Saved your life? Someone shot you in the dream?"

MacGyver nodded. "In the dream, Murdoc shot me — never mind, he's an old enemy — but the bullet hit the knife, as you see."

Laura lifted the knife thoughtfully. "I'd be curious to know if this knife saved the ghost's life as well."

J.J. shook his head in a vain attempt to get back on track. "Just tell us when you first encountered each object."

MacGyver and Laura exchanged glances, and Laura nodded firmly at her friend. Mac sighed dramatically. "Well, in order, in a dream, after I had been shot, and after I had been hit on the head by a flower box falling off a fire escape."

"Ow." J.J. winced in sympathy.

"Yeah, it takes a lot to get Mac's attention," Laura commented wryly. "He's got too strong a hold on reality."

MacGyver grimaced at her. "Whose side are you on?"

"First you send me a cryptic note and now, a whole year later, I find that you've been receiving more apparitions. Who do you think? The ghost's, of course. Poor thing must be frantic by now."

Mac seemed taken aback. "You're serious."

He turned to J.J. for support, but the other parapsychologist merely eyed him speculatively. "Hmm, if it's that hard, I'm not sure how well hypnosis will work."

"Nuh-uh, no hypnosis."

"We have to find out who is sending you these things, MacGyver," Laura said reasonably, "and why. Otherwise they'll just keep coming." She glanced at her colleague. "Directed dreaming?"

"It's a possibility," J.J. agreed slowly. He had the same reservations as to its effectiveness with her friend as he did about hypnosis, however.

"Why?" MacGyver jumped upon the idea. "You mean, there's a reason why these things are being sent?"

Laura sighed. "Mac, I told you when you first called me, apparitions often turn up in association with psychic quests. They usually only appear around powerful psychics, since it takes a great deal of energy for them to manifest. So, unless you're hiding some great ability —"

"Nope, not me," MacGyver was emphatic.

"Then someone is going to a great deal of trouble to ask for your help."

"But I helped them already!" He lifted the Native American pendant. "Standing Wolf showed me where to find the original map of the Lakota reservation and we were able to stop New Plains Electric from stringing high tension lines across sacred land." He put down one necklace and picked up the other. "Arthur asked me to stop Morgana from developing gunpowder — not that he knew what it was at the time, of course."

"Of course," Laura agreed. J.J. realized his mouth was open and shut it with an effort. He could tell Laura didn't know what was going on either, but she believed this MacGyver. Who was this guy, anyway? He spoke so matter-of-factly — almost apologetically — about being shot and stopping bombs that he sounded almost professional military or law enforcement. But stopping an electric company was more in line with an environmentalist. And where did the dog whistle come into this?

"Anyway, Merlin and I stopped her, rescued Cecilia — and I got shot at that point, so I still don't know if I managed to clear my ancestor's name or not." He stopped and looked at his audience. "I'm not crazy, J.J."

J.J. shut his open mouth again. Laura chuckled softly beside him. "We've heard much worse, Mac." She picked up the knife. "So, whom did you help with this?"

MacGyver turned, swinging his arms wide. "I thought myself. It was just a dream. I wasn't even me, I was some Civil War veteran —"

J.J. looked up when MacGyver didn't continue and saw the man staring at the darkened windows of the sleep lab. "Reflection," Laura whispered cryptically and got to her feet. J.J. felt the growing chill and hurried to his instruments.

"Do you see him, Laura?" MacGyver asked slowly, still watching the darkened window.

J.J. glanced at his colleague. Laura was more psychically sensitive than he was and had seen ghosts on several occasions. Counting on a positive answer, he knew exactly how MacGyver felt when Laura shook her head. "I see you, Mac. But that's okay; you're the one he wants to communicate with. What is he doing?"

MacGyver sagged, releasing his breath with a sigh. "He's gone. Probably wasn't there at all. Just my imagination."

J.J. returned his attention to his instruments and smiled. "Not unless your imagination can influence all these readings. I'd say something was there."

Laura turned back to the table. "And here, too."

J.J. joined them as Laura and MacGyver approached the table. The apports had moved. Now the knife rested atop the balled-up chain necklace while the circular pendant was a short distance away, its remaining feather pointed back at the knife.

Laura looked at her friend. "This mean anything to you?" At his wordless shrug, she shook her head. "One thing's for sure, we've got to find a way to communicate."

They discussed their options over carryout Chinese, due to Laura's reluctance to leave the apports in the office while they ate or to bring the objects along. "I see only two choices," J.J. said, pointing with his chopsticks for emphasis. "Hypnosis or directed dreaming."

"Three," MacGyver replied firmly, fishing out a chunk of tofu, "we leave it alone."

"You've tried that already, Mac," Laura disagreed. "And you've ended up with two more apports and a new reflection in mirrors. All the information we have in our database on apports indicates that it's dangerous to ignore them."

"Dangerous to whom?" Mac asked, his attention on the contents of his takeout box.

Laura decided to press the point. "To the receiver ... and to those close to him." Mac looked up, and Laura nodded. "We have to find out what is so important to this ... Civil War veteran that he is willing to waste so much energy to throw things at you." MacGyver winced, and she continued. "You said yourself that you couldn't find anything matching the events of your first dream using the resources of the Phoenix Foundation."

"Nothing here, either," chimed in Celia Powell, the department teaching assistant, from her position at Laura's terminal. "I logged into the USGS Geographic Names Service at the Yale Peabody Museum via Internet: no town or city called Serenity in Montana or any other Western or MidWestern state." The petite brunette squinted at the screen, then made a face and closed the search with a shake of her short cropped head. "I've also checked the roster of ghost towns — no Serenity."

"We can assume from the position of the apports that the three 'dreams' are definitely related," J.J. mused. Laura glanced at him, and J.J. shrugged slightly before continuing. "The positions of the chain necklace and the knife could mean that the Arthur dream and the Western one are directly connected, while there is some connection with the Native American dream. So, what elements are in all three dreams?"

Laura decided to play along. J.J. apparently was not going to push Mac into direct confrontation with the ghost, and she trusted her colleague's background in psychiatry. Maybe he was counting on Mac seeing for himself that there was no way they could work out the ghost's request without asking the spirit itself. "Mac, you were shot each time. Was it always the same place? The wound, I mean?"

MacGyver shook his head. "No. And I was shot for real when I met Standing Wolf, not in the dream."

"But you were shot in the Arthur and Western dreams?" J.J. queried. At the blond man's nod, he frowned thoughtfully. "Maybe that's an element from the ghost's background – that whole idea of gunpowder in the Middle Ages seems so unlikely. What are the other similarities?"

Mac put down his carton. "Wait a minute. The first dream was about control of water rights. The next ..." he pointed at the pendant – "the land was dying. You could feel it."

"And the third?" Laura prompted.

Mac nodded in growing understanding. "Morgana ruled a wasteland. Merlin said the land had been blighted by her experiments. That must be it."

"So, you have a ghost that's an environmentalist." Celia observed airily. "That still doesn't tell you what the problem is or where it is." She leaned back in her chair and opened her fortune cookie.

J.J. and Laura exchanged glances. J.J. lifted an eyebrow, and Laura shrugged in answer to his unasked question. "Mac," she started.

MacGyver fingered the circular design of the feathered pendant. "She's right. We *don't* know what the problem is. I guess the only way to find out what he wants is to talk to him."

"Of course I'm right," Celia answered smugly. "You going to eat that fortune cookie?"

Laura tossed the rejected packet Celia-ward, her attention more on the way MacGyver continued to finger the pendant. "Standing Wolf?" she asked.

MacGyver nodded. "He saved my life, Laura. If he's involved with this other spirit, then I owe it to him to listen."

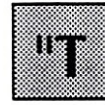
"Right," J.J. began, "are we agreed then on –"

"Communication is the key?" Celia sputtered, reading the small slip of paper from MacGyver's fortune cookie. "This is one *pushy* ghost!"

"You got that right," Mac affirmed dryly.

Laura eyed her friend and was relieved to see that Celia's comment had sparked humor rather than his former stubbornness. "I'm sure it's just coincidence."

Mac rolled his eyes. "Yeah, right, like all of these other ... apports, huh?" He replaced the pendant atop the table. "So, what do we do?"



his isn't exactly what I thought 'directed dreaming' meant," MacGyver complained a short time later. He struggled to get comfortable on the sleep lab bed but was careful, J.J. observed, not to dislodge the electrodes attached to his face and scalp. The parapsychologist waited until MacGyver settled, then attached a few more.

"We've gone a bit farther beyond what I helped the Foundation's dream research facility with," Laura explained calmly as she adjusted a monitor to a better viewing angle. "But you've still got the easy part. All you have to do is sleep. *I'm* the one who has to attempt to match your brainwave patterns – and with your warped way of thinking, that could take all night!" She settled back into her chair and attached the remainder of her electrodes.

"Uh-huh. And the heart monitor and the –"

"Merely a precaution," J.J. soothed, although he could tell the man was not fearful, merely resigned. He added medical equipment to the list of items with which MacGyver was acquainted. Sometime he and Laura were going to have to have a *long* talk about her friend.

"Yeah, we almost lost J.J. once," Celia inserted, "when a stroke victim lost control of his dreams and –"

"Thank you, Celia," Laura interrupted smoothly. "I'm sure Mac will find it easier to sleep with that thought in mind."

"Oh," the teaching assistant caught on. "You won't have that problem with Laura," she reassured MacGyver. "She –"

"Celia," Laura warned again. "Is that Mac's pattern on the right-hand monitor?"

"Yes. Yours is coming up now on the left-hand. And the tone you have to match is –" she listened on the small headset, then carefully placed the set on Laura's head – "this."

"Good. Thank you. Now go help J.J. monitor. Still with me, Mac?"

MacGyver sighed as he stared at the ceiling. "I'm not sure this is going to work, Laura."

"Humor me. So, how many Western dreams have you had?"

"That I remember? Three now. I found the knife after the first one, but nothing happened with the second."

Watching from outside the sleep lab, J.J. raised his eyebrows at the faint indication of embarrassment on the monitors, but said nothing. He gestured at Laura through the sleep lab window to continue. MacGyver seemed to be calming as he talked.

Laura nodded, then returned her attention to her monitors. "You mentioned before that Standing Wolf saved your life when you were shot. How could he do that in a dream?"

"Larry Whitecloud said he met a spirit who showed him a vision of the future. Well, after I was shot, I met the same spirit, Standing Wolf, only before he showed me Whitecloud's vision, he removed the bullet. The necklace was part of his healing ceremony. When I woke up, the bullet had been removed and *someone* had patched me up. And the necklace was around my neck." Mac shrugged. "Now, maybe I just dreamed him from Larry Whitecloud's description, but I have my doubts."

J.J. looked questioningly at Celia, who was now standing watch over the instruments by his desk. She raised one thumb up. "Our friend is back," he announced softly into the headset.

Laura glanced at MacGyver, then back at her monitors. "Okay, Mac, I want you to think about the last time you were in that Western dream. When you enter REM sleep —"

"The dream stage," MacGyver added sleepily.

"Then I will try to match my brainwave pattern to yours and enter your dream. You don't have to do anything but picture being back there, back in the Old West."

J.J. only half-listened as Laura spoke. His monitors reported the same findings as Laura's brainwave pattern monitors: MacGyver was falling asleep, and at a pace which suggested the man might

have been more sleep deprived than he had thought.

"Stage one sleep," Laura's voice said in his headset, "and he's already starting to enter stage two."

J.J. could feel the temperature drop as Laura reported on MacGyver's progress through the normal sleep cycles: stage three, stage four, back to stage three, stage two —

"Get ready," he warned. "His pulse rate suggests REM sleep might start any second."

"Beginning biofeedback."

J.J. watched as Laura relaxed, her dark eyes intent on the two brainwave patterns on the monitors. He glanced quickly at Celia and could tell from her nervousness that the apport-sender's presence was still being registered by the equipment. Returning his attention to his own monitors, he saw that MacGyver was indeed already in the dream stage of sleep. Laura had closed her eyes, and her pulse and breathing rate was almost a match for MacGyver's. There was nothing more J.J. could do but watch and wait.

MacGyver's pulse suddenly shot up, and J.J. looked up to see him sit up with a startled sound. "MacGyver?"

The man looked at him with eyes that at first did not see him, then shook his head as if to clear it. "Well, that didn't work."

"Laura?" J.J. glanced at Laura's readings. She was still at MacGyver's previous readings. "Laura, can you hear me?" he called into the headset.



Can anyone hear me?" Laura turned slowly, studying the buildings lining the dusty street. One moment the street had been filled with busy passersby and riders and in the next, they had all vanished. Even the horses at the hitching posts were gone. The town seemed deserted. "MacGyver?"

In quick succession, she checked the saloon and the general store. Both empty. But the playing cards scattered atop the tables at the saloon and a slowly rocking chair at the general store suggested that the inhabitants had been there only a short while before. She frowned down at her jeans and

African print vest. Her attire had not changed to fit in with the dream; that was a bad sign. Perhaps *she* was now controlling the dream. Laura shook her head. First she had to find MacGyver, then she could get some answers.

In the livery stable, a horsey murmur led her back through the gloom to a stall where a man was currying empty air. The profile was very familiar. "Mac! There you are!"

The man froze in mid-motion, then slowly turned toward her. Laura squinted at the face beneath the cowboy hat and bushy mustache. "You're not MacGyver."

"No, ma'am." The man turned back to his currying. "Neither are you."

Laura smiled. The voice wasn't MacGyver's either, but the pleasant politeness reminded her strongly of her friend. "You *do* look like him, though," she said, thinking to herself that the cavalry blue trousers with the yellow stripe and the non-matching brown shirt with a blue bandanna might not be quite MacGyver's style.

"That a fact." The man went through the motions of stepping to the other side of whatever he was currying and resuming his work.

With that clear a view, Laura could confirm her first impression. The face could almost be MacGyver's, but the features were slightly blurred in the way family members sometimes resemble each other. "Tell me, is there really a horse there?"

Startled, the man looked at her, then back at the space before him. A slight smile quirked the mustache. "Sometimes." A murmur came from the empty space, and his sleeve jerked as if something tugged at it.

Laura raised her eyebrow. Something was definitely wrong with this dream. Still, she had found the spirit MacGyver had described. Now if she could only find Mac. "My name's Laura Wingate. I'm —"

The man tipped his hat. "I'm right pleased to make the acquaintance of so charming a lady. Name's McIver."

Laura paused at the compliment. "Ye-ah. I'm a friend of MacGyver's. In fact, I was supposed to meet him here."

Anger flashed swiftly across his face, and McIver resumed his currying. "That a fact."

Realization dawned belatedly and Laura sighed. "He woke up, didn't he? No wonder this dream is so odd! You — you're maintaining these bits, aren't you? Why? What do you want?"

McIver stopped currying and walked around the invisible horse toward her. The anger in his eyes made her back a step from the stall. "I want him to listen! Dad-blamed skittish — Every time I try to tell him, he takes control of the dream — *my* dream! — and changes everything!"

"If you'd tell me —" Laura tried.

McIver shook his head, his anger gone as quickly as it had appeared. "He's kin — distant, but kin. There's a promise involved, a sacred trust I can't betray."

Laura sighed. "I'll try to respect your wishes in this, but Mac's going to need my help to talk to you. I might find out anyway."

McIver tilted his head in the way MacGyver usually did. "Might. Might not. Just bring him here. Make him listen."

She shrugged. "I'll do my best. Making him listen will be another story. The hard part is keeping MacGyver's attention."

McIver chuckled. "Some have said that about me, too." He raised his head, listening to something she couldn't hear. "You'd best go back. Folks are getting a mite worried about you."

"But —" she started when she suddenly saw past his shoulder. A gray transparent horse shook its mane and whickered at them. But beyond the horse, back in the shadows, was a wolf. A solid-seeming wolf, which opened its jaws in a wolf grin at her.



Laura? J.J. watched as the readings began to change. "Stay put, MacGyver. She's coming out of it." He abandoned the medical monitors and went to

Laura's side as she roused. "Hey, Laura, you had us worried there for a few seconds. You okay?"

Laura blinked and focused on him. "Only a few seconds? It felt like I was there at least a half an hour."

"That's right," J.J. agreed, remembering his last experiences with directed dreaming. "Dream time is different. Where were you? Did you meet him?"

Laura nodded, then turned toward her friend. "You stood me up, MacGyver! What happened?"

The sandy-haired man spread his hands. "I don't — I was there, then I woke up."

"Well, we've got to find a way to keep you there long enough for him to talk to you. He won't tell me the problem. Says you're kin, and that makes you the only one he can tell."

"We're related?" MacGyver seemed stunned.

"We could always hit him over the head," Celia suggested from the lab doorway. "Hey, it's what worked on him before," she added as two heads turned in her direction. "Of course, I wouldn't recommend using a flower pot, but hey, we've got enough artifacts in this office alone to keep him in dreamland as long as you need."

J.J. and Laura exchanged long-suffering looks. MacGyver, however, didn't appear to have heard. "Laura, did he say his name? Was it ... M'Iver?"

"Close. Mclver, I think he said. You know him?"

"Not him, but the name's close enough. My ancestor from Arthur's time was M'Iver. That's probably why the amulet and the knife were put together." Lost in thought, he started to get up to pace, but was brought up short by the electrodes still connecting him to the monitors. He sat back down on the edge of the bed. "Laura, I want you to describe everything you saw — everything he said."

Laura obeyed, and J.J. decided that now was a good time to bring the apports and some of his more portable sensing equipment into the lab. Freed from equipment-watching duty, Celia went back to Laura's terminal and keyed in queries at a furious pace. He had everything moved just as

Laura finished with a description of the wolf. J.J. wondered why she seemed to feel that that image was important when she asked, "Do you think it was sent by Standing Wolf?"

His colleague's instincts were once again accurate. In the startled look MacGyver directed at Laura, J.J. read enough to revise his estimation of the ghost shaman upward. MacGyver wasn't about to admit it, but *he* obviously thought the link between the wolf and Standing Wolf was stronger than a familiar and a shaman. J.J. shelved that thought away for further musing as MacGyver laid back on the bed with a grim, "Let's try it again."

Laura glanced back through the lab window at him, and J.J. merely raised one shoulder in response. "Okay, Mac," she agreed. "Just keep in mind that he's a lot like you. Now picture the town about you ..."

Once again MacGyver fell asleep with an ease that made J.J. uneasy. He and Laura waited as MacGyver's brainwave patterns charted his descent through the various sleep stages. "Coming back to stage two," Laura noted. "Starting biofeedback —"

"Wait," J.J. stopped her. "Just wait one moment."

"Why?" Laura queried. "Look, he's just entered REM —"

"And he's out again," J.J. finished.

Laura looked at her monitors and mumbled something he couldn't catch on his headset. "Pardon?" he asked.

"— he said he would try! Look, let's give it one more cycle, okay?"

They waited while the patterns swung back from the deep sleep of stage four up to stage two and REM sleep. "It's not working," Laura said finally. "He's barely *in* REM sleep before he's out again. What happened?"

J.J. scanned the readings and sighed. "I was afraid of this. This ghost has probably been haunting your friend right into a self-induced REM sleep deprivation. I think, Laura, your friend fears the loss of control. Hypnosis, dreams —"

"Commitments," Laura inserted.

J.J., realizing that he hadn't seen any rings on MacGyver's hands, suddenly understood. Laura smiled at him. "J.J., you're right. So, none of our usual techniques will work. How do we get those two to communicate?"

J.J. looked innocently at the ceiling. "There's always Celia's suggestion."

There was a satisfied "Ha!" from the direction of Laura's terminal. J.J. sighed and reminded himself that he hadn't spoken loudly enough for the teaching assistant to hear his remark to Laura. "What has your 'tinkering with the warp engines' brought up this time, Celia?"

"Him! The ghost, I mean. There's a McIver — I can't make out his first name — listed in Union records as serving with Sherman. Then he — must be the same person but no first name listed — turns up with the 9th Cavalry in Texas."

"And then?"

She sighed. "And then he vanishes. Can't even find a death record. And I was hoping this new genealogical directory would have it. I'll have to check the paper records at the library tomorrow."

J.J. glanced at his watch. If he wasn't monitoring two people, he would have said it was long past time to call it a night. He surveyed his other pieces of equipment and corrected himself. If he wasn't monitoring people *and* didn't have a ghost close enough to register, he would have said it. "Go on home," he told Celia. "Laura?" he said into the headset.

"Tell you what," she answered sleepily, "when Mac wakes up, give him a crash course on how to match brainwave patterns and have him try to enter *my* dreams. I'll stay here tonight."

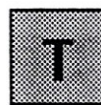
"Our ghostly friend is still around," J.J. warned, discounting her first suggestion. They both knew how much training it had taken them to use this level of directed dreaming.

"Good. Maybe he'll drop this 'kin only' deal and tell us what we can do to help him." She yawned. "You doing okay, J.J.?"

"I'll watch the monitors. You be careful."



MacGyver found himself in darkness. "Laura?" He started forward, then stopped as he found himself facing a full-length mirror. His reflection shimmered, and his reflected clothing was suddenly that of the late 1860s: a mixture of cavalry uniform and civilian casualness. The face beneath the turned-up brim of the cowboy hat was a stranger's. The figure reached out and his hand emerged from the mirror's surface. "Wait! Come back!" the cowboy demanded as darkness again closed over the mirror. MacGyver slept on.



The pen fell from his hand and clattered onto the floor. J.J.'s head snapped up and he peered at the monitors. Time to get some caffeine. He rubbed his eyes wearily, half-remembering blurred dream images from the brief seconds they had been closed. One, that of a Native American with long black hair and a buckskin shirt, stood out most vividly. He walked over to the coffee pot and poured himself a cup, then glanced at the sleep lab window and almost dropped the cup. The Native American from his dream was looking back at him from the window.

J.J. looked behind himself at the empty office, then turned back to the window. He could see his reflection dimly, and could look through the window and see Laura and MacGyver still asleep. He rubbed his eyes again. No new reflections appeared in the window. He examined the level of coffee remaining. "I'd better make a second pot."



The circular pendant was in her hand, but Laura didn't remember picking it up. She suddenly realized that the missing feather had been replaced, the white patch at the base of the gray and black feather blazing against her dark skin.

The wolf sat and grinned at her, then abruptly vanished.

"I am honored," a voice said from behind her.

Laura turned and found herself facing a Native American with long black hair, wearing a decorated buckskin shirt and fringed breeches. She resisted the urge to comment on the stereotype, looking past it to the man. He was taller than her, but shorter than MacGyver or J.J. The lines of his face marked his age as anywhere

between 45 and 60, but his dark eyes were ageless. "You're Standing Wolf?"

The man inclined his head. "Twice honored. That you bring this —" he pointed at the pendant — "with you and that you know my name. My fame must be spreading. First a white man and now you know of me." He beamed.

Laura warmed at his smile. Mac seemed to know the nicest ghosts. "MacGyver brought this to me.

He needs to know why McIver is trying to contact him." She turned, looking about them. They seemed to be in a cave, or some type of enclosed space — the details blurred and shifted if she tried to look too closely. There was no sign of MacGyver. She turned back to Standing Wolf. "Can you help?"

He shrugged, a string of beads and feathers appearing and disappearing in his loose hair. "Ay-a. We all must help for them to succeed. Before the danger increases. Come, I will show you what you need to see."

She followed him deeper into the cave. As they walked it was no longer a cave, but a building. A military installation, judging from the signs Laura could dimly distinguish on the walls. And yet, she still had an impression that this installation was underground.

They stopped at last in a large room. Laura squinted at a figure in the center of the room. "That's a chemical warfare suit." She looked closer at the shapes lining the walls. "Those are artillery shells. Standing Wolf —"

Her companion was gone. Instead, a white and gray wolf nosed at the base of the closest row and suddenly backed away, shaking its head and sneezing as if to dislodge an unpleasant scent. Laura watched as a red-glowing cloud oozed forward after the wolf and suddenly realized that those weren't just artillery shells. They were nerve gas containers! She backed away, frantically running through a mental list of nerve and mustard gases and symptoms of exposure. She suddenly found it hard to breathe. Difficulty in breathing was the first symptom of the nerve agent GB, reported the clinical side of her brain, followed by cramps, drooling, vomiting, and death within minutes due to respiratory failure as the victim loses control over all muscles, voluntary and involuntary.

She backed into a solid body and turned to find Standing Wolf behind her. The weapons storage had vanished from around them, and she took a deep breath as she realized from the night sky above that they were outside.

"Where are we? How did we get outside?"

"I took a short cut," Standing Wolf said with a smile. He looked off to his right, and Laura saw a large mountainous shape, dark against the starry night sky, looming in the near distance. Her attempts to make out any details were abandoned as soon as she realized that the red cloud was oozing down the sides in several streams.



tanding Wolf is not great at telling you the straight story," MacGyver explained the next morning. "He likes to put things in symbols and let you figure things out for yourself." He sprang up from his perch on the bottom of the flight of steps leading up to Laura's desk and began to pace back and forth in the area in front of the couches, from the farther steps leading to her desk to the steps to J.J.'s desk and back.

Laura lowered her coffee cup, relieved to find that she was not the only one dissatisfied with the shaman. "So you don't think there's a leak in the weapons storage facility."

Mac paused in his pacing long enough to allow Celia off Laura's steps. The teaching assistant placed a large box of doughnuts on the table in front of the couches and, settling herself on the couch next to Laura, opened the lid with a flourish.

Laura and J.J. were still watching MacGyver, whose path now went from the farther steps to the sleep lab. "Not if he also showed you the outside," MacGyver continued. "He might be trying to tell us that there will be problems with the incineration process."

"Incineration?" Celia asked, passing the doughnut box to Laura.

"Something Mac started to tell us when you came in," Laura said absently before noticing the doughnuts. She hesitated between a plain glazed and a walnut frosted.

J.J. leaned over and snagged a cherry filled before replying. "The U.S. Army has decided on incineration to destroy most of its old chemical weapons." He stepped unhurriedly out of Mac's path and retreated to the coffee pot. "But I thought that only two facilities were in operation right now, the JACADS in the Pacific and now the Tooele Army Depot near Salt Lake City."

MacGyver nodded. "The weapons are stockpiled at eight sites around the country and one in the Pacific, where they will — by the terms of the Chemical Weapons agreement — be destroyed within the next seven years. I don't remember Montana being one of the sites."

Laura hated to raise the point. "Are we even sure this place is in Montana? McIver did say you changed things."

Celia looked relieved. "No wonder we can't find any computerized records of Serenity — not if where it was is now next to an Army storage facility."

MacGyver stopped and thought a moment, his brown eyes looking unseeingly at the wall next to him filled with J.J.'s equipment-laden shelves. Finally he shook his head. "I'm sure it's Montana."

"Easy enough for you to check," Laura commented, waving her doughnut, "with your connections."

MacGyver hesitated. "I don't work for the Phoenix Foundation anymore."

Laura wasn't about to relent. "But I bet you do freelance. And something like this would definitely interest the Foundation." Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed J.J.'s reaction to the name and smiled to herself. She had noticed her colleague's growing puzzlement of MacGyver's wide range of knowledge. J.J. had contacts within the U.S. Army from his psychiatry days; he would know of the Phoenix Foundation from them.

MacGyver sighed. "Yeah, if we had something to go on. What am I supposed to tell them — there *may* be a tenth site in Montana that *may* have problems with an incinerator that *may* have been constructed ahead of schedule? They're going to want more proof than a few visions. They're going to want something they can document."

"Well, you can tell them that you're going to investigate it — just as soon as they give you the location in Montana."

"And if they don't have the location?"

"You're going to have to have a talk with your ancestor."

MacGyver winced. "I'll call the Foundation." He gave her his best impersonation of a hurt puppy dog as he turned toward the phone on Laura's desk.

J.J. leaned over the back of the couch. "You're mean, Laura."

"You knew that."

"Yep." J.J. tilted his head at her friend. "So did he. Guess he prefers being pushed around by you than by the ghost."

Laura stifled a grin. Trust J.J. "You sensed me weakening there, huh?"

"Just a bit."

Celia sighed. "Me, too. Such sad brown eyes ..." She fell silent, and Laura and J.J. turned in unison to look at her as she gazed after MacGyver. She suddenly shook herself. "Oh well, he's too old. So," she continued brightly, "want me to see if the library has listings of the land-deed records for Montana?"

"Please," Laura said hurriedly. She looked after the TA as the young woman left. "Sometimes I wonder about her."

J.J. choked back his reply as MacGyver returned with his report. "The Foundation hasn't heard of a site outside of the nine I know of — and the Army is just starting the test phase at Tooele — it's not planned to be fully operational until 1994. Until then, no outside agencies allowed."

"Uh-oh," J.J. replied. "Sounds like a touchy situation."

"Well, after the National Academy of Sciences released its report this summer on the alternatives to incineration, activist groups have been watching all of the sites."

"Even touchier," J.J. agreed.

"So it's entirely possible that there *may* be another site, out of the public eye," Laura argued.

"And how are we supposed to find it — play Ouija board with a map of Montana and hope that —" MacGyver froze as they all heard a solid "thwunk." "Aw, man ..."

Laura got to her feet. "My desk — Celia left the maps there when she brought the doughnuts."

"Well," J.J. commented, as they gathered at the desktop, "he's nothing if not persistent." The pocket knife's blade had been opened and it now stood point-down through the photocopy of the 1865 map of Montana, pinning the rest of the stack to the blotter.

MacGyver caught up the phone and pressed "redial." "I'll check and see if the Foundation knows of anything at that —" He stopped, the receiver at his ear.

Laura looked up from checking underneath the blotter in time to see an odd expression cross his face. "Mac?"

MacGyver looked curiously at the receiver. "I just heard a voice saying 'Look up —'" He froze, looking toward the sleep lab window.

Laura followed the direction of his stare. "J.J.!" she whispered fiercely.

J.J. looked up. "Hey, didn't we leave the lights on in there? What? Laura? Do you see something?"

Laura followed MacGyver down the steps toward the window of the darkened sleep lab, keeping her eyes on the dim figure that waited within the glass. He seemed to have cleaned up for the occasion, the brown shirt no longer sweat-stained, the blue bandanna crisp. Even the hat looked cleaner. "Took your time about seeing me," McIver commented as they approached. He tipped his battered hat. "Good to see you again, Miss Laura."

"Good to see you, too, McIver," Laura responded.

MacGyver looked from one to the other. "What — Is he saying something, Laura?"

McIver whipped the hat from his head and beat it against his leg. "Dagnabit! He is the stubbornest —"

"He says you're stubborn," Laura relayed.

"Looks like he's saying more than that," MacGyver replied as McIver slammed his hat back on his head and glared at his distant relation, talking all the while.

"— bad enough he had to change my first warning, but when I tried again, he —" the ghost sputtered — "he had to bring his ladyfriends into it!"

"Something about bringing your girlfriends into his last warning," Laura transmitted with a straight face.

"Hey, I've got problems in my life, too!" MacGyver protested. He looked closer. "Laura, he's fading."

"All right, calm down, the both of you!" Laura ordered. She looked swiftly around for the apports, caught up the circular pendant, and pressed it into MacGyver's hand. "Sit down and try to relax."

"But he —"

"Do it!" She turned to the ghost, who was indeed barely visible. "You calm down, too. You're not going to help matters by fading out before you tell him the problem."

"Tell him? How am I going to tell him? He can't hear me!"

"We're working on it."

She turned back to MacGyver. "Can you still see him?"

MacGyver shrugged. "Kinda."

"Okay. Relax. Will yourself to see him. Don't deny him."

Mac grinned. "Hey, you see him, too. Kinda hard to believe we're *both* crazy." He glanced at McIver. "Sorry. Hi. I hear we're related?"

McIver crossed his arms and studied him.

"Don't say something I'll refuse to repeat," Laura warned the spirit. She turned to her colleague. "J.J.?"

He raised his hands in denial. "Don't look at me. You're the one who's been able to see the ghosts, remember? The kid's father on the bridge? The witch-burning judge?"

"Don't remind me. I almost got burned at the stake." She thought a moment, realizing that MacGyver would reject any attempt at stabilizing the link through hypnosis. "J.J., bring me the map and the other apport."

He obeyed, adding softly as he handed her the items, "You're doing fine. Give them a way where they'll both feel they're in control and they'll work together."

She nodded and headed back. Placing the map on one of the tables before the window, she handed MacGyver the chain necklace. "Here, put this on. It can't hurt," she added as he eyed it dubiously. He nodded and obeyed, then put the pendant necklace on as well.

Mclver nodded approvingly. She glanced at him as she opened the road atlas J.J. had thoughtfully included with the map. "I don't know if you can see this from there," she started, then stopped as Mclver stepped out of the window and moved closer to the counter. He was more transparent than he had been in the glass, but at least he was visible. And, from a quick look aside, she could tell MacGyver could still see him as well.

She quickly scanned the road atlas, looking for the corresponding point from the 1865 map. She deliberately kept still as MacGyver joined her, but noticed that he was keeping her between himself and Mclver. Mac quickly compared the two maps, then stabbed a long finger at a point in an unlabelled spot in the mountains. "There. That seems to be the place." He looked closer at the road map, a puzzled note in his voice. "It seems to be in between the Gallatin National Forest and the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness. But, there's no rail line — I remember a railroad — no Stoney Creek, not even the spring."

"Two towns with 'spring' in the name nearby, though," Laura commented. "It's pretty close to Yellowstone for what we think it is." She wondered why MacGyver was so surprised. Had

the dreams seemed that real? If so, she was going to have to grill him for more details; there was no telling what item — overlooked by him — might be important.

She glanced up at Mclver and found that he seemed to be equally taken aback. His surprise was to be expected, though. Most ghosts weren't aware of the passage of time or changes after their deaths.

Mclver shook his head, muttering, "Bozeman. Not the Bozer brothers ..."

She cleared her throat and got their attention. "Umm, you wanted to tell him something?" she reminded Mclver.

The mustache twitched in a scowl. "No offense, Miss Laura, but I gave my word. I can't be saying it to you."

She groaned. "It's the kin thing again," she explained to MacGyver. "He can't tell me to tell you since I'm not family."

A similar scowl appeared on Mac's face. "Well, you can just go find someone else to help you, then."

They looked so much alike at that moment that Laura wanted to laugh. She opted for a different approach to defuse the situation. "Okay, let's put that aside for now. From what Standing Wolf showed me last night, we think we're dealing with a chemical weapons incinerator. Is that right?"

"If you mean cannon shells filled with poison, then I reckon we're talking about the same things," Mclver replied slowly. He tilted his head. "Standing Wolf spoke to you?"

Laura blinked. "Well?" MacGyver asked.

Laura shook her head. "Slight differences in terms, but it sounds like we agree." She turned back to the veteran. "Yes, Standing Wolf spoke to me." She was beginning to feel insulted. Why was Mclver surprised? Did he think that no other spirits could talk to her because she "wasn't family"? She decided to use that emotion. "Didn't you know? Don't you spirits talk to each other?"

"Uh, Laura?" J.J. tried.

Mclver hesitated, and Laura decided to go all out. "Pardon my asking, but what brings you into this? This sounds like a simple enough problem – MacGyver would probably be in on this if he still worked for the Foundation –"

"I was when the dreams started," MacGyver reminded her.

"– but why you? What is so important that you have to throw things at Mac to get his attention and manifest yourself – no mean feat in terms of psychic energy – in order to talk to him? Is there a leak of these poisons?"

"Some, but it's under control for now." Mclver seemed relieved to have a question he could answer.

"Whose control?"

"What? Is there a leak?" MacGyver inserted.

"Laura!" J.J. insisted.

"Excuse me," she murmured and turned away from the counter. She was grinning as she neared J.J.'s desk, but she carefully kept her back turned to MacGyver. "So, are they talking to each other yet?"

J.J. looked past her. "I can only see MacGyver. He looks like he's talking, but – No, he still doesn't seem to be able to hear."

"Damn. I was hoping I would be annoying enough that Mclver would try harder."

J.J. smiled. "You had me fooled."

"J.J., I'm surprised at you." She grinned, then shrugged. "That means the block is on Mac's side still."

"You mean, MacGyver can't hear because he doesn't want to hear?"

"You tell me; you're the one who told me he fears loss of control." She looked back at MacGyver and Mclver and saw that there were definitely still communication problems. She sighed. "I hate wasting a good mad. Mclver's good, though. I couldn't shake him into telling his secret."

"Maybe it's gold," J.J. suggested. He lifted one of the books Celia had retrieved from the library. "The 1860s and '70s were times of gold strikes in the Montana Territory." They looked at each other uneasily, and Laura could see her colleague also remembered the smoke ghost they had found guarding a gold hoard. They had barely escaped with their lives on that case.

Laura shuddered. "I hope not. He doesn't strike me as a crazed prospector type, though." She studied the ghost. "Looks like we'll have to check out that site."

"We'll?" J.J. repeated.

"Hey, you've met Standing Wolf, too. Want him in your dreams for the next two years?"

"Two years?" J.J. struggled to bring his voice back down. "Uh, no, if it's all the same to you."

"Well, that's how long it took Mac to bring me all the apports – it will probably take that long before he and Mclver can talk together. So, think you can cover my classes okay?"

"I probably should come along as the only person *not* under ghostly influence," J.J. muttered, glancing toward the sleep lab window, "but I have a feeling MacGyver will feel outnumbered as it is."

She grinned at his rueful nod, then straightened her vest and went back to the one-sided conversation.

Only it had deteriorated into no conversation at all. Mustache and eyebrows scowling fiercely, Mclver stood with crossed arms while MacGyver was in the process of moving all the maps up to her desk. "I need to use your phone," he explained absently. "I'm sure I've been there before – but I don't think it was an Army facility, at least, not then. I wish I could remember ..." He caught up her phone, still beeping plaintively from when he had dropped it, broke the connection, then redialed.

Laura walked over to the stiff-backed ghost. "He still can't hear you?" she asked gently.

"Nope."

She shrugged off the rebuff. "Well, at least we've got him headed in the right direction."

"Yep."

She stifled a smile. If ever two people were more alike ... She sighed dramatically. "Maybe we'd get better results if we hit him over the head?"

The mustache twitched.

"Ah, you smiled. I saw you!" She leaned against the counter. "C'mon, I would have thought that any relative of *his* would have had at least five different plans after yelling at him failed." She nodded in Mac's direction. "What about the phone? It worked before."

"I've been trying," McIver muttered through his mustache.

She drummed her fingers against the counter in thought, then started up the steps to join MacGyver at her desk. He looked up at her approach, placing one hand over the mouthpiece of the receiver. "It's all set. I'm booked on an afternoon flight and —"

"What about *my* ticket?" Laura interrupted.

MacGyver shook his head. "I —"

"— work better alone," she completed. "Yes, Mac, I know, and ordinarily I'd agree with you. But you need me to come with you." She glanced from one to the other, McIver having followed her up the steps. "Unless you *want* to waste time playing charades ..."

MacGyver uncovered the mouthpiece. "Uh, Pete, can you make that *two* tickets?"

Laura's phone was ringing as J.J., refreshed from a trip home for a quick nap and a shower, re-entered the office in the early evening. He had only planned to stop in the office long enough to record his impressions of the previous night's events before he forgot the finer details, so he hoped whatever student was calling didn't have a long list of problems with an assignment. He frowned at Laura's humming terminal as he lifted the receiver.

Laura and MacGyver had left for the airport before he had gone home, and he distinctly remembered Laura closing up her files. Celia might have turned the computer back on, but it wasn't like the

teaching assistant to lock up the office and leave computers on.

"I'm trying to reach MacGyver," a harried voice stated from the receiver before he had a chance to speak.

"This is Professor Stillman," J.J. responded. "I'm afraid MacGyver has left already." And that was another curiosity about the fellow, he added mentally, no first name. Still, 'J.J.' wasn't a true first name either.

"Sorry, wrong phrasing," the voice apologized. "A number of things have come up and I need to reach MacGyver. Does Professor Wingate have a mobile phone?"

"No, I'm afraid not." J.J. was distracted by movement in the darkened sleep lab window. The Native American — Standing Wolf, he corrected himself — stood there.

A sigh came over the line. "I'll have to try Bozeman. Look, this is Peter Thornton. If MacGyver tries to contact you —"

Standing Wolf gestured as J.J. peered at the faint image. The spirit seemed to be pointing at something behind J.J.

"— warn him —" Thornton continued.

J.J. started to turn in the direction Standing Wolf indicated and something bit the side of his neck. Suddenly weak-kneed, he fell forward, clutching at the chair but only succeeded in overturning it. He distantly heard the clatter of the falling chair and the voice on the receiver.

"— that we've had a response to his — Professor Stillman?"

He twisted enough as he hit the floor to dimly see the man who had injected him. Another shape was bending over the keyboard to Laura's computer. Then reality shut down.

The cowboy reached out of the mirror toward him, and MacGyver snapped awake. He re-oriented himself, glancing around the plane's interior while his breathing slowed. In the seat beside him, Laura was still reading the articles Celia had tracked down for her. He looked closer and,

recognizing the page, decided he had probably only dropped into sleep for a second or two. "Those rows of storage bunkers could almost look like mountains," he suggested.

"If you were very, very short," Laura replied, rolling her eyes in his direction.

"They're pyramid-shaped," he persisted.

"Only if you look at them from the front. If you're suggesting that these are what I saw in my dream, then I'd have to say —" she held up the picture, turned it in several directions, squinted — "no." She sighed and tapped the magazine picture. "But these are the storage bunkers at Tooele; they're long and mostly underground because they've got the room for that in the desert. Maybe the bunkers where we're heading are built above ground." She turned the page and nodded, jabbing at a picture of two men in hazardous material suits standing at the end of two long rows of 155 mm artillery projectiles. "This I remember from the dream." She read part of the caption aloud, "A mere whiff of the deadly poison is designed to kill a human being within a minute'."

"You can do a lot in a minute," he reassured her, "and I'll make sure we'll have more time than that."



ust a minute, he's coming 'round."

J.J. barely opened his eyes and stared up at the dim figures surrounding him. His mouth was dry -- aftereffect of some drug, one part of his mind recognized -- and he could feel a tight squeeze around his upper arm -- identified belatedly as a blood pressure cuff as his vision cleared and he recognized the paramedic/fire department uniform on one of the figures.

He blinked and slowly recognized Celia as another of the figures. "You look awful," she observed with a frown.

"Thanks so much," he replied hoarsely. He struggled to sit up and the paramedic helped him silently as Celia continued.

"I was worried. We couldn't get you to respond at all. That nice Mr. Thornton explained that they were probably planning to question you —"

"Thornton?" he interrupted. "I was talking to a Peter Thornton right before I —" He faltered, glancing at the empty window of the sleep lab.

"He called us," one of the two people in Security T-shirts inserted helpfully. "Said he heard you being attacked."

"And they called me," Celia added, smoothly taking back the conversation. "Anyhow, Thornton suggested what the paramedic should use and it worked."

J.J. fastened his gaze on the large "Security" on the closer T-shirt, still feeling detached from his body as the paramedic rechecked his vital signs. "Did you catch them?"

"No. There was no one around when we entered the office — just you on the floor."

"They must have left when they heard you coming. There were two of them — I didn't see them until —" he lifted a hand to his neck, remembering.

The paramedic checked the spot. "Definite sign that something was injected there."

"Fast-acting, whatever it was," J.J. said ruefully. "I had enough time to see someone behind me and another one at the terminal, and then I was out."

The Security woman by the door nodded, lifting her walkie-talkie. "We'll recheck the building. The other patrols will watch for any suspicious strangers on campus. You'll stop by the office later so we can make out the report? You, too," she added to the paramedic. At their nods, the team departed.

"You'll feel out of it for awhile," the paramedic observed, putting away his equipment, "so don't try to do anything strenuous."

"Not a problem," Celia commented with a bright smile as the paramedic left. She looked down the hallway, then closed the office door. "So, do you think this is connected with what MacGyver was investigating? Mr. Thornton did. Now, why would the head of a privately funded research institute with concerns in environmental studies, conservation efforts, and diplomatic relations know so much about espionage?" He must have looked blankly at her, because she then added, "Phoenix Foundation. It has a Gopher site."

J.J. shook his head. Either he was still drugged or Celia was making less sense than usual. "I'll need to talk to Thornton. Laura needs to be warned."

Celia raised a hand. "Mr. Thornton says he'll handle that. He *does* want to talk to you, when you're making sense." She frowned, studying him. "You still look awful."

"I feel worse. How did they know to come here? Why?" He rubbed the side of his neck, convinced he could feel a welt rising there.

"Well, I *had* been using Gopher a lot. I might have hit a site they're watching." She righted the chair before Laura's terminal, studying the keyboard. "They could have tracked this terminal down by its IP address." She slid into the chair, her fingers moving briskly over the keyboard. "They'd have to be pretty good to do that ... Uh-oh."

J.J. straightened. Celia *never* used that tone of voice unless it was a major disaster – and Celia classified very few things as a disaster. "What 'uh-oh'? Is there something wrong with the database?" He felt a sinking feeling in his stomach. Years of work, all their cases, research on psychic and paranormal occurrences in various cultures of the world – anything happening to that database would indeed classify as a major disaster.

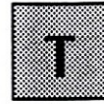
Celia stared at the screen, her face paling then flushing with anger. She slowly looked at J.J. "We've got a virus."

"A virus?" J.J. repeated. "How can you tell?"

The teaching assistant looked disgustedly at him. "I ran a mem command and found problems in the memory. I didn't trigger it, if that's what you're implying."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to imply anything. Can you fix it?"

"Hèy, I'm good, but I'm not going to risk this database. If they broke in here just to put a virus in, that virus is probably big trouble." The TA snatched up the phone beside the terminal. "I'm calling in the big guns." She punched in a number. "Corey, Celia. Got a challenge for you, Mr. LaForge."



he clocks at Gallatin Field in Bozeman said 9:20 pm by the time they disembarked, but, what with time zone changes, plane changes, and several interrupted naps during layovers and flights, it felt later. Even so, MacGyver snapped wide awake when he read the message waiting for him at the car rental desk. Laura peered at the slip of paper. "Company. Call me. Pete." Well, he's being a bit cryptic." She hitched her thumb toward the nearest phone. "Shall we call in?"

Mac shook his head, carefully looking around without seeming obvious. "We'll find another, just in case we're being watched here. C'mon."

"You got all that from that message? I'm impressed."

Mac glanced at the exit to the parking lot, then turned and started deeper into the terminal, Laura at his heels. She caught up with him when he stopped to choose the next direction. "Spy stuff," she commented, adjusting her grip on her bag. "I thought you gave it up when you left the DXS."

MacGyver explained patiently, stifling a growing concern. "Pete's ex-DXS, yes, just like I am, but he wouldn't expect me to remember code words from that long ago. And Pete wouldn't leave a message for me unless something serious had happened."

"So ... the message is exactly that. We should expect company – bad company – and call him for more details. Well, why not call back there? Best way to get lost is in a crowd."

Mac spotted another phone sign and started for it. "Someone could have been waiting for us at the rental desk or bugged the phones there. I just want to chose one at random –"

"And be totally unpredictable. Okay, I can get with that program. Is this bank of phones far enough away? I'll stand guard."

MacGyver grinned at her and dialed. The phone was snatched up quickly at the other end as if Pete had been waiting for his call. Knowing Pete, MacGyver thought he probably had. "Mac! Thank goodness you called. We've got problems."



"I hate problems like this," Celia complained.

J.J., finding that the dry taste in his mouth had vanished after the sixth cup of coffee, could agree with her. He leaned back on the couch and studied the ceiling, probing tentatively at the blank in his memory. *Had* the intruders been able to interrogate him? Or had Security reached the office before they had had a chance to start?

The campus computer wizard, highly recommended by Corey, merely tsked as he worked at the keyboard. "It's not that big a deal, as long as you make backups. You *did* run a backup recently, didn't you?" When Celia remained silent, he looked at her, then nodded. "O-kay, it *is* a big deal."

"Celia —" J.J. inquired.

"Look, it was late last night and we had that spook around, and there wasn't time!" She crossed her arms and scowled at the infected terminal. "Who *were* those guys?"



All in all, MacGyver thought Laura was handling the news about the raid on her department rather well. She hadn't said a word as they crossed the parking lot, and her brisk stride seemed to indicate that any would-be mugger would be a fool to cross her — the anger was there, just waiting to be released. It was still there as they found the rental car — a Jeep Grand Cherokee — the Foundation had reserved for them.

Laura glanced past him at the terminal. "So, what's the plan? It's too dark to hunt this place up now."

MacGyver stowed his bag in the back seat and checked that the items he had requested — two Army standard issue chemical weapons protection kits, the same that workers at the Tooele Chemical Disposal Facility considered part of their uniform — were hidden inside. He showed the green canvas bags silently to Laura as she reluctantly tore her gaze away from the sight of the nearby mountains long enough to toss her own bag inside. She raised her eyebrows as he also uncovered maps of the area with details the Foundation thought important and two small

cameras — one regular and one with nightsight — as well. "Good people," she commented softly.

He smiled, knowing that the maps and cameras had to be Pete's touch. "The best." He brought the maps with him into the driver's seat. "The plan? Try and get some rest and then start looking for this place as soon as it's light." He started the engine, and released a mental sigh of relief when the engine caught and nothing else happened.

Laura didn't seem to notice his momentary hesitation, intent instead on buckling in, locating and turning on the maplight and opening the maps. "Same old routine, huh, Mac? Check as much of the site possible beforehand, then break in at the best possible time at night." She sighed. "I wish we could stop at Montana State University and look at their resources, but I'm afraid we'd find the same thing that Celia did going in through Gopher — nothing in the computerized records and anything on paper either stolen or destroyed in some convenient fire."

MacGyver checked out of old habit for anyone following them as he pulled out of the parking lot. A dark green Ford changed lanes to take the same exit. "The Foundation added more detail on the survey map."

"Got it." She studied the marked area closely. "Not many roads at all — I can't see them transporting what Standing Wolf showed me on some of these dirt trails."

"Depends on how long ago the site was constructed. If you have enough time, you can hide almost anything. There was a fire in that national forest in 1988 — that could be when they brought in the construction equipment. The new growth would have covered any signs by now. I figure we'll probably have to leave the Jeep at some point and walk."

"Lugging those green bags as well. How heavy are they?"

"Light. You can either strap it to your waist or carry it over your shoulder. But I do recommend bringing it. It contains either the Army's standard issue chemical weapons protection kit, or the Foundation's version of it. An M9 gas mask and three small Mark I self-injecting canister kits designed to treat the effects of nerve gas. Tooele has three types of nerve gas, and so might this

site." He grinned lopsidedly at her. "I didn't want to take the chance we couldn't 'find' any spare kits."

"Thank you! You know, between Standing Wolf's visions and McIver's cryptic comments, I'm getting more than a little worried about what we might find out there."

"That's assuming our guide will show up."

"Hey, McIver promised to guide us past any possible guards. If nothing else, he *is* a man of his word."

He scowled at the reminder. "I just wish I knew what his big secret is."

"You and me both." Hearing her tone of voice, Mac glanced away from the road briefly and caught her studying him. "J.J. thinks it might be gold," she admitted finally.

"McIver's secret?" He thought about the suggestion, examining what he remembered of his dreams. Gold strikes had been mentioned in both, but he didn't remember much importance being placed on them. He finally shook his head. "I hope not. I've had enough of treasure hunts."

Laura straightened. "Then how about a food hunt? That grocery looks like it's open."

Mac checked the rearview mirror for any possible "tails." "You're hungry now? It must be at least midnight Toronto time."

She closed the maps. "I'm thinking about later; I'll bet you didn't plan on bringing any food along."

"We can travel lighter if we don't carry anything —"

"— and just scavenge along the way, yes, I know, Mac. Ordinarily I'd agree, but I'm not going to snack on anything growing near where I suspect a chemical dump."

"Good point."

A

nd he said," the man in the next row over in the grocery store parking lot disagreed loudly with his companions, "that Yellowstone had been invaded by UN troops — and you can tell they're still there."

Mac strained to hear the reply, but it was drowned out by the rattle and squeaks as the three men climbed into their pickup and drove off. He glanced at Laura, who raised her eyebrows in a "did I hear that right?" manner. He nodded ruefully and unlocked the car.

Laura slid her small sack of groceries into the back seat. "And I had originally thought you and Pete were being paranoid ..."

MacGyver studied a dark green Ford parked in the next row as he put his sack of groceries on the floor behind his seat. He was only vaguely aware of Laura saying something, his attention more on the area around them as he slid behind the wheel, buckled in and started the engine. He only relaxed when they exited the lot and the Ford stayed in place.

Laura leaned back. "I know this is hard for you, Mac, but maybe if you let go and accept McIver for what he is rather than analyzing him, he'll be able to tell you his big secret himself."

MacGyver scrambled to pick up the thread of the conversation, thankful that she couldn't see his face in the dark. "You're serious about this — you really think that I'm the reason why I can't hear him?" He shook his head. "So that's why J.J. kept trying to teach me some new meditation exercise."

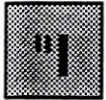
Laura made an amused sound, but her voice was serious as she continued. "We've seen similar situations — in fact in one case everyone in the family could see and hear their family ghost — all except for the wife. She kept insisting that everything the spirit broke — and that everyone including J.J. and myself could see the ghost was throwing about — was either being broken by her son or her father-in-law, who was confined to a wheelchair. I'm just glad you can see McIver; it's a good first step."

He thought about that for a few stoplights, then finally asked, "What happened? To that family?" He glanced over when there was no reply and saw that Laura was asleep. He went back to thinking and planning as the city slipped by outside the car.

W

ispes of smoke drifted around her as her attention focused on the small fire in the center of the smoothed circle of earth. She was seated crosslegged on

the ground, and drumbeats echoed through her bones. Standing Wolf knelt before the person next to her, ritually painting her neighbor's face with smooth, even strokes. He came to her, and she sat still as he placed a bowl between them. Smoke rose from the burning herbs within. His lips moved soundlessly in a chant that she could almost place from the ceremonies she had attended, and he fanned the smoke over her with gentle waves of a redtail feather. She closed her eyes, letting herself be drawn into the drumbeats, using the pulse to center herself.



Inside the mountain," Laura muttered softly. MacGyver glanced at her to see if she was talking in her sleep and saw that she was studying the mountains around them. They had long ago left Bozeman but were still on Route 191, heading for Livingston. Her voice had a groggy edge to it, indicating that she hadn't been awake long as she continued, "I keep remembering that I had the impression when I was following Standing Wolf that I was underground or in a cave."

"Or a gold mine?" he suggested. In the light from the instrument panel he could see little but her profile but he could feel her scowl. "Okay, we'll find out soon enough. Want to stop for a proper rest?" He continued quickly, "I know, the original plan was that we'd stop somewhere until first light, but, after thinking about what Pete had said, I wonder if it's a good idea for us to stay in one place too long."

"What else did Pete say?"

He took a deep breath. "It's more what he didn't say, like how those people managed to track down the Phoenix employee that was making inquiries about chemical storage sites. And how they got to your computer so fast."

Laura reopened the maps and turned on the maplight. "There are several campsites along I-89. We can drive until we really need to stop and check out some of those spots. I have to admit, I'm not looking forward to the possibility of both Standing Wolf and McIver nagging me in my dreams." She hesitated briefly and he wondered if she had had any dreams in the brief time she had been asleep. "Do you smell that?"

"What?"

"Tobacco ... and ... something." She sounded puzzled.

He sniffed, but could only detect the oranges in the grocery sack. "Probably left over from the previous renter."

"Hm," she agreed. "Anyway, you may be able to shut those two spirits out, but now that they know I'm around, they'll concentrate on me. You holding up okay?"

"I'm fine," he said, pushing any thought of sleep away. As long as McIver was around to haunt his dreams as well, he was better off staying awake.

"Ye-ah," she answered. "Don't think I haven't noticed you dozing off and then snapping awake. It's getting worse, isn't it? Do you remember any of your dreams?"

"Dreams?" MacGyver strained to remember. "No, nothing."

"Either we wrap this up soon or I'm going to have a *long* talk with your ancestor. Sleep deprivation isn't good for you, Mac."

"I know," he agreed, remembering his last encounter with Murdoc. He had been running short on sleep during that assignment with the Phoenix Foundation. However, he wasn't experiencing the same symptoms of sleep deprivation now as he had then. "I had plenty of sleep last night in the lab."

"But no REM sleep, Mac. Now, current literature has determined that REM deprivation doesn't lead to gross psychological changes, but still —"

"— REM sleep is important for long-term memory, I know."

"Sorry, lecture mode off."

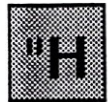
"No. Hey, I'm sorry. It's just that I don't think Standing Wolf will let us take too long in doing whatever he and McIver want done."

"So you feel it, too."

"What?"

"A sense of urgency. That there's a reason why Mclver is pushing so hard now instead of two years ago."

They finally stopped at one campsite that was far enough off-road to reassure MacGyver's "worst case of paranoia," as Laura labelled it. Even then, he did his best to hide the Jeep from casual view. Back on the road again at first light, they soon turned off I-89 onto a two-lane road, crossing the Yellowstone River and nearing the national forest.



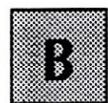
ave you heard anything from Laura?"

J.J. stared bleary-eyed at the receiver. How had Thornton managed to track down his home phone number? And why was he calling at this hour of the morning? His voice didn't sound as if he had heard bad news. "No, not a word. Why, do you expect results already?"

"I never know what to expect with MacGyver," the older man replied cryptically. "How's your computer?"

"My computer wasn't touched. It tested out okay. Laura's is now clean as well, and I was told that it was a very tough, very nasty virus." He shuddered to think what would have happened to the database if Celia hadn't detected the virus's presence.

"Must be the same one they used here, too. I'll be in touch, then. Oh, and check your office phone for bugs." The connection was broken, leaving J.J. very wide awake.



efore too long they had reached the point where they had to go off road to reach Mclver's knife-pointed location. "Good thing you got the model with good suspension," Laura grumbled, clutching both the dashboard and the seat as the Jeep bounced. She shifted her grip as he steered the Jeep between two fairly large trees on an incline.

MacGyver concentrated on his driving as Laura struggled to reopen the maps. "We might have to walk if this stretch gets any worse."

She grabbed at a map before it slid off the seat. "Yeah. I don't see any back road heading to where we're going."

Soon after, however, they intersected an unpaved road. Mac and Laura looked at each other. "It's not on any of the maps," Laura pointed out, looking back through her collection.

"It's heading in the direction we want."

"If we meet anyone, *you* get to do all the talking."

"Deal," he agreed and turned the Jeep onto the trail.

The driving was bumpy, but much smoother on the trail. "Now remember," Mac said finally, reminding himself as much as Laura, "all we have to do is prove that this site is there. With that alone the Foundation can start to raise questions about why it's there and whether it's affecting the environment. If we can prove there are leaks, so much the better, but Pete said not to be too concerned about risking our necks on that. In fact, he was going to look into having the Foundation have a flyover testing the air emissions just as soon as we report back."

"Uh, haven't you forgotten somebody? From what you've told me, I can see this satisfying Standing Wolf, but what about Mclver?"

"You don't think this is what Mclver was sending me dreams about?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so. What's the big family secret about this? He seemed surprised that Standing Wolf told us about this, too." She sighed. "I'm having trouble figuring out where Standing Wolf fits in. You said you met him at a Lakota reservation. The Lakota are a branch of the Sioux and out here there's the Oglala Sioux and the Assiniboin Sioux, just for starters. You found a dead wolf in the cave with you when you woke up — that could mean Standing Wolf was buried there, but maybe not.

"And then there's this little detail. We keep seeing Mclver dressed as if he had just left the Army, say 1865 or 1867. The Battle of Little Big Horn took place east of here in 1876 — where was Mclver then?"

"Lots of questions," MacGyver agreed. He caught a flicker of movement ahead and braked in time to avoid driving the Jeep through the transparent form of Mclver. The spirit directed them off the road.

"He's getting pretty good at charades," Laura commented as MacGyver maneuvered the Jeep far enough away from the trail so that it wouldn't easily be seen. After they got out and convened at the back seat, Laura pushed a few granola bars into her pockets and shoved the grocery sack in his direction. Glancing at the afternoon sun, he pocketed a few bars as well, then caught up the remaining chemical protection kit. Laura, who had examined the contents of hers during the drive, fastened hers under her coat. He handed her the normal camera to pocket as well. "Got the apports?" she asked once again. He sighed and patted his black leather jacket where the two necklaces hung under his shirt and pulled the pocket knife partway out of his pocket. Wondering once again why she was so insistent about the objects, he checked and pocketed the nightsight camera.

Laura handed him nightvision goggles. "You're not to take them apart, lose them or make any other modifications," she instructed tersely, tucking a second pair inside her black and brown patchwork jacket. "They're J.J.'s and he wants them back intact. Two pairs set our department budget back a bit, but they're invaluable for investigating so-called haunted houses." She shrugged at his quizzical look. "I know you tend to travel lightly, but I like to have some preparations made."

MacGyver checked one last time on the position of the Jeep as they joined the spirit near the trail and reassured himself that it was hidden as well as something that size could be.

"He says there's a guard further up the trail," Laura relayed. "He'll show us the safe way around him."

MacGyver squinted at the semi-transparent figure. Like them, Mclver had a coat on against the chill fall weather, but the spirit couldn't actually need it. Or could it? Still, the light-colored coat and hat would make him easier to follow once the shadows began to deepen. And, MacGyver was pleased to discover, his ancestor was very good at moving clandestinely. Not that it would probably matter for a ghost, he reminded himself. Still, it would have been irritating to follow someone who walked through the trees and brush rather around them as Mclver was doing.

MacGyver glanced at Laura as they quietly moved through the forest. She was still as woodswise as

when he had first met her in Siberut, back in his DXS days. Reminded of those days, he tried to pinpoint where the guard might be stationed amid the trees and bushes, knowing that that location would be important on their return to the Jeep. Finally he was rewarded with a faint glimpse of camouflage through the brush far to their right. He studied the location, struck by a strange sense of *deja vu* as he attempted to memorize its placement in relation to the road and the Jeep.

Mclver and Laura had stopped to confer, and MacGyver quickly joined them. "Where's the entrance?" he asked softly.

"Mclver says he's going to show us a safer way in —"

MacGyver shook his head. "I *need* to see the entrance."

"Why?"

"I don't know. This area seems somehow familiar, as if I've been here before —" He stopped as Mclver started speaking soundlessly. There was a very sarcastic twist to the man's mustache, and from the way he folded his arms as he finished, MacGyver had a definite feeling he already knew where he had seen this area before.

Laura looked from one to the other. "Uh, you want me to translate that?"

"Never mind. I'm sorry," he said to his ancestor. "I didn't know at the time." The mustache rippled with an unheard snort, and the ghost started forward, muttering as he did so. MacGyver let him get a short distance ahead before asking, "I'm not like that, am I?"

Laura tugged an imaginary hat down over her eyes. "Yup." She grinned, then followed Mclver.

MacGyver sighed. "You couldn't lie, and spare my feelings?"

They stopped long before they reached the edge of the clearing, but where they had an unimpeded view of the long single-story building at the foot of a cliff face. "It's just a bunkhouse," Laura commented. It looked to be in good repair, although very rustic. A plume of smoke rose from the stovepipe, and there was movement behind

the windows. Two men dressed in hunting gear came out and walked slowly down the long porch.

"It's the hideout," MacGyver breathed in wonder.

She glanced aside at him. "From the second dream? The one where 'nothing happened'?"

"I didn't know, okay?"

"Wasted all that time rescuing his ladyfriends," McIver muttered irritably, "when I had important things to tell him."

"Well, tell *me* then," the parapsychologist replied. "I don't see what this —" she gestured at the bunkhouse — "has to do with anything."

"It's not the bunkhouse," the two said together — McIver with exasperation and MacGyver with the pleased note of discovery. "The bunkhouse is only the cover, the facade," MacGyver continued, oblivious to McIver's reaction. "What we are looking for is in the cliff-face behind."

"The hole-in-the-wall gang," McIver agreed, glancing continuously at Mac, who was now scanning the cliff-face, "got their name from the cave. Any posse showed up, the gang would retreat to the cave until the posse gave up and went away."

"He says the hole-in-the-wall gang has a cave," Laura passed on.

"And well-hidden, too," MacGyver agreed. "Show us — wait —" He held out his hand and, thus reminded, Laura handed him the regular camera. They ducked down as more men — one in a Park Ranger uniform — emerged from the bunkhouse. Some went to the far side of the building and drove off in a battered pickup while others remained on the porch. After snapping a few pictures, MacGyver turned toward the ghost. "Okay, can you show us the cave entrance?"

McIver glanced toward the cliff-face and shook his head. "Too busy right now. Best wait until nightfall."

MacGyver glanced again at the cliff-face as she relayed the message, but he followed as the spirit led them back into concealment. He started checking his pockets. "Have you got any string?" he asked. "Or thread?"

"What are you planning?" she asked with amusement as she began to check her own pockets.

"Oh, just a few things to delay any pursuers when we leave tonight." He gratefully accepted the small amount of fishing line she discovered left over from a camping trip, and the tag with elastic the airline had insisted on attaching to her carry-on bag. He had a small tangle of string from his own pockets.

"Can I help?" she asked, waving the book of matches she had picked up somewhere and had forgotten she had in her pocket.

Mac smiled. "Sure. It will be just like Siberut."



hey set a small series of triplines — to swing branches into pursuers' faces, trip their feet or distract them by flinging small rocks elsewhere — along their planned route back to the Jeep. McIver seemed to think along the same way as Mac, Laura noted. The spirit began to suggest some traps as well. After noticing the amount of traffic along the trail, MacGyver — with McIver on the trail to warn them of any approaching vehicles — moved the Jeep deeper off-road. Which meant they then had to move some of the triplines.

The activity outside the bunkhouse had quieted down when they returned after sunset. Laura was relieved to note that Mac looked rested — although he had napped away the rest of the afternoon, she hadn't been too sure how well McIver had listened when she warned the spirit against intruding into their dreams.

MacGyver snapped a few pictures of the bunkhouse with the cliff-face behind it with the nightsight camera, handing Laura the normal camera to pocket. McIver waited until they had finished, then led them along the edge of the clearing to a point where they had a clear view of the back of the building and of the cliff-face. Laura squinted through the shadows, then finally slipped on the nightvision goggles.

"Looks well-guarded," MacGyver murmured. He aimed the nightsight camera as Laura finally found the cave entrance. Netting and other camouflage disguised a good portion of it from normal sight and infrared, but, estimating from what she could

see left unhidden, she thought it was large enough for a truck to enter.

"That camera have a telephoto lens as well? I don't see anyone."

The camera clicked softly. "Small flare from a lighter just inside the entrance. And the windows in the back of the bunkhouse have no shades." He lowered the camera and donned his goggles. "No telling what type of electronic sensors they could have as well. You said you had a safer way to get inside?" he asked without looking at Mclver.

"Yes —" Mclver hesitated, and Laura glanced at the spirit, instantly suspicious. Mclver looked as if he had been caught in something, and Laura suddenly knew what he was going to say.

"Oh no, you don't," she interrupted. "I'm not staying here."

"What? What's he saying?"

"He hasn't said anything yet, but he looks the same way you did when we were trailing that soldier who claimed to be clairvoyant." She didn't know if MacGyver would remember her first assignment with the Phoenix Foundation — although she understood that he had recommended consulting with the then one-person Parapsychology Department — but she remembered his one instance of overprotectiveness.

"Oh." MacGyver turned and lifted up his goggles long enough to study them both, then returned his goggled gaze to the cliff-face. "That look. Well, let me know when you've finished frying him to a crisp and we can move on. Don't take too long, though. They might have patrols."

Mclver looked disgustedly at his relative. "Please understand, Miss Laura. I promised."

Laura suddenly wished that MacGyver couldn't hear *her*. Mclver wasn't trying to protect her from whatever was inside that cave; he was still intent on passing on the "family secret." Although how he thought he could do so without her —

"I was right, though, that time," MacGyver mused thoughtfully.

Laura stared at his profile, surprised. "You were not." Had he forgotten that if she hadn't followed him after alerting Peter Thornton, he would have been dead? She almost missed the slight nudge of Mac's head toward Mclver. "Oh, yeah, *that* time."

"Seems to me like we've already done what we came for," Mac continued reasonably. "We know the site exists. Pete can take it from there. I'm just curious as to *who* is running this little hideout. And, with Mclver's help, it shouldn't take too long to answer that. Just do exactly as you did last time." Out of Mclver's sight, he held up three fingers.

Laura nodded slowly, struggling with the conflicting plans. Mac wanted her to wait three minutes and then follow, while Mclver didn't want her along and probably wasn't going to bring MacGyver into the installation. She had told Mclver she would try to respect his wishes, and it was time to keep her word. Maybe. "Right. Like last time. I'll just wait right here."

Mclver was so visibly relieved that Laura couldn't bear to look at him directly. "Thank you, Miss Laura," he said, tipping his hat. Mac's eyebrows were just about visible above the goggles as he edged slowly after the ghost.

"Oh, Mac," Laura reminded softly. "Remember the dreams."

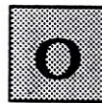
Raising the goggles, MacGyver turned to look back at her, clearly puzzled.

"Try not to get shot this time."

His answering expression was pained. "Yeah, I'll keep that in mind."

Laura glanced at her watch as they moved out of sight. Three minutes to go.

Once they had traveled a short distance from the cliff-face, Mclver started up a gentler slope of the mountain. "Why do I have this feeling I should have brought some rope?" MacGyver muttered as he followed, feeling exposed on the sparsely wooded incline. He was grateful for the nightvision goggles. With those, the occasional outcropping, rock or determined tree was more a help than a hinderance as available starlight was amplified 20,000 times. He looked back in the direction of



the cliff-face, noting the small landslides dotting the slope, and tried to estimate how long the installation inside must be from the entrance to where they now were. *At least a city block long. No wonder Laura said it was big.* He didn't see Laura yet, when he glanced back the way they had come, but he didn't doubt that she would be able to follow the small pointers he had left to mark the trail.

McIver waited beside a large outcropping with a peculiarly twisted short tree at its base. He held out a hand to stop him when MacGyver would have continued onward, then carefully mouthed the words, *wait* and *watch*. MacGyver nodded. Maybe they could communicate without Laura. McIver nodded once back in reply, then pointed back down the way they had come.

Laura glanced back at her watch. The three minutes were up. Time to go after the two Macs. She looked toward the cave entrance and stayed in place, staring. "Now what's *he* doing?"

Standing Wolf stood by the cave entrance. He gestured for her to come.

Laura closed her eyes then opened them. Standing Wolf was still there, fringed buckskins and all. "I don't believe this," she groaned.

MacGyver scanned the slope below them again, then glanced back at McIver. The ghost had his eyes closed and seemed to be concentrating. Mac studied his watch. If McIver didn't hurry up, Laura would be coming into view any minute now, and they would have a sulky ghost on their hands again. He caught a brief flicker of something downslope and started to hide, only to stop and stare.

McIver was scrambling up the incline toward him, clutching something underneath his coat. Only — MacGyver glanced aside and saw his relative still standing next to him, eyes closed. Mac took a deep breath. *Okay, it's a vision, like Standing Wolf's. Wait and watch, remember.* He looked down again.

McIver was coming closer up the slope. Two figures ran into view at the bottom and were joined by another, who pointed up the mountainside and raised his gun. The other two

raised rifles. McIver swerved suddenly, and Mac realized that the gang was shooting, although he couldn't hear any sound.

The gang started up the slope, still firing soundlessly. McIver had just passed MacGyver and his ghostly self when he froze, and MacGyver knew the man had been hit. He crumbled and fell beside the outcropping — only he seemed to fall *through* the ground.

The gang members, scattered in their approach up the mountainside, faded into transparency and vanished. MacGyver turned toward McIver, who opened his eyes, smiled apologetically, and disappeared. Shaking his head, MacGyver moved toward the outcropping.

The tree at its base was peculiar-looking, MacGyver discovered, because it was growing out of the side of a deep crevice. The crevice opening was partially blocked with tree branches — more so than it probably had been a hundred years ago, Mac figured — but he was able to clear an opening wide enough to glance inside. At the bottom was a crumbled figure. An arm stirred weakly as he watched.

"Hang on —" he started, then stopped as he saw another McIver leaning against the wall, watching. *Re-enactment again. Wonder how he can stand to watch what happened to him?* It looked as if he was expected down there. Mac checked his pockets. "Knew I should have brought some rope," he muttered.

Laura crouched against the cliff-face, hoping that no one was looking out the bunkhouse windows at that moment. She scanned the portion of the entrance she could see and mentally revised her estimate of its width upward. *Drive a truck through, hah. Try a semi.* She glanced inside long enough to register the absence of guards and the location of possible hiding spots, then took a deep breath. *Right, then. Here's hoping I haven't already triggered every alarm in the place.*

She slipped inside, hurrying into the sheltering concealment of a stack of crates labelled "Property of U.S." From there, crouching on the uneven rock floor, she studied the warehouse-sized area, noting the hanging overhead lights, the unfinished rock walls, and the scattered islands of crates and barrels. In the shadow behind several dark blue

drums she saw the sway of long black hair and a hand beckoning her on. *He'd better have a good explanation ...* She sprinted for the drums, keeping in the back of her mind the fact that ghosts could sometimes influence electronic equipment. If they felt like it.

She reached the drums just as a guard emerged from the shadows at the back of the cave. Edging around the drums and watching as the guard continued toward the entrance, she bumped into a very solid back. Before she had time to react or notice anything other than long black hair, her elbow was caught in a strong grasp.

"Wait," an unfamiliar male voice whispered, and Laura heard a distant squeak of a chair from the direction of the entrance. She caught a faint whiff of tobacco and cedar. "Now, let's go!"

The grip on her elbow was gone, but she followed her guide to the next hiding place behind a forklift. He was young — late teens or early twenties although something about him said "sophomore" rather than "freshman" to her academic eye — Native American and proud of it with that hair, while the dark jeans and black shirt suggested he had planned for this invasion as she and Mac had. He nodded to her in greeting, then unfolded his tall, skinny frame up to check over the top of the forklift.

She decided to check the direction they seemed to be heading. There was a large set of double doors toward the back of the cave, one side of which was open. She glanced at the crates alongside the back wall. Although "Property of the U.S." was stenciled on their sides, the next word was smudged enough to be unreadable. And, despite the labels, this did *not* feel like a normal military installation.

Her guide dropped down beside her. "Greg," he introduced himself. "You must be the other vision quester Grandfather told me about?"

"Grandfather?" Laura interrupted. "As in actual relative or term of respect for elder?"

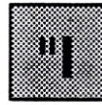
"Elder ... and mentor." Greg nodded approvingly. "He said you would understand."

"Well, there's a lot I don't. I'm Laura Wingate, by the way. Did Standing Wolf bother to mention that?"

Greg smiled. "No, but that's not his way. He did say that you would know how to reach the place we must be."

"He did, huh?" She remembered the faint scent of cedar and tobacco, often used in Native American purification ceremonies. There were several possible explanations as to why that particular combination would cling to this young man's clothing, but, given his apparent age and the shell necklace just visible within his shirt collar, her bet was on only one. "What's he teaching you? How to speak as cryptically as he does?"

He merely grinned and edged toward the door. Laura mentally sighed. *I did not come here to follow a shaman-in-training into a military installation.* But she did anyway.



"I hate heights," he muttered softly. Clinging to the scant hand- and footholds in the wall of the crevice, MacGyver glanced downward briefly to check on his progress. One McIver was still leaning against the wall to Mac's right while another inched his way painfully across the broken ground toward his later self. From the dark patch of blood left on the ground where the replayed McIver had landed, the bullet wound was obviously serious — and it was equally apparent that some bones had been broken in the fall. His right leg flopped uselessly behind him as he dragged himself forward. He kept glancing back up at the opening as if he expected the gang to locate him.

His own fingers slipped slightly, and MacGyver returned his attention to the rock wall. A combination of the leather laces from the sides of his jacket, several branches and a liberal use of duct tape had enabled him to swing to an adequate handhold from the crevice opening. Although it should have been impossible to see anything inside the mountain, with the nightvision goggles it was possible not only to see, but to climb. Granted, the six inch tube in front of his face was troublesome, but at least he hadn't had to make the climb with his penlight clamped between his teeth.

He reached the bottom just as the crawling McIver reached the wall. MacGyver split his attention between him and the motionless leaning spirit as the injured McIver carefully pulled a bundle from inside his coat and placed it into an opening in

the wall. With many a glance upward, he piled rock fragments in front of the opening until, satisfied with the result, he pulled himself up to sit, his back against the wall. Then he faded out.

The remaining McIver looked up at last and met Mac's gaze. He started speaking soundlessly. MacGyver hated to interrupt, the man looked so weary. "I'm sorry, I still can't hear you."

McIver's mustache sagged as he grimaced in frustration and looked skyward with a "give me strength" expression. He tugged his hat back into place and pointed at the hiding place in the wall.

"Okay, you hid something there and you want me to get it." Mac moved to the approximate spot and, finding the shielding fragments, removed them. Inside the opening was a small bag of dark brown leather no bigger than the palm of his hand. The leather was soft, decorated with the remains of quillwork, and he could feel objects inside the bag, all different shapes and varying degrees of hardness. "This is it? What's inside?"

He started to untie the bag but stopped as McIver shook his head violently, waving at him to desist. "What? What is it? What am I supposed to do with it?"

McIver started speaking furiously, then stopped and looked disgustedly at him. He pointed firmly at MacGyver, then cupped his hands behind his ears.

"I *am* listening! I'm just ... not hearing you." He glanced at the ground, but found no help there; the rock was too hard for writing. He rummaged in his pockets. "You don't happen to have a pencil and paper on you?" *I'll bet Laura brought pen and paper with her ...* "Look, just try speaking slowly and I'll try to follow along. You ... couldn't get rid of that mustache, could you? It makes it hard to lip-read. Just a thought," he hastily added as McIver recoiled with an offended look. While McIver glared at him, Mac risked a look up at the crevice opening. Where was Laura when he needed her?

Standing Wolf had to be helping them, Laura decided. Unless Greg was somehow more trained than his age suggested. There was no other explanation for how they could have managed to get this far into a military installation without

being challenged. They had almost been spotted by the guards at least twice, but each time something else had distracted them, pulled them away from stumbling upon the two. She was surprised at how well she had remembered the directions from her dream, especially since she knew she hadn't been paying attention to that aspect when she had followed Standing Wolf.

She stared through the thick glass into the room of stacked canisters and rows of 155 mm artillery projectiles. Almost as an afterthought, she remembered the camera in her pocket. She pulled it out and began snapping pictures – both of the room full of death and the control room she now stood within.

Greg sighed beside her. "I'm here, there must be some reason why Grandfather wants me here, but I don't see what it is. What *am* I looking at, Laura?"

"Death on a large scale," she said bleakly. "A single drop – no bigger than a pinhead – from one of those containers could kill either of us instantly. Just one of those projectiles, detonated, could kill all animal life within ten miles."

"Oh," he replied in a small voice and Laura could understand. There were a *lot* of containers. He sighed. "I still don't see what I'm supposed to do. You and your friend will try to stop them."

"Well, there's something here that obviously neither of us are seeing. What do you see with a shaman's eyes?"

Greg brightened. "You *are* good." He stared at the barrels as she resumed picture-taking. "There's something around a few of those, but it's just a faint glow ..." The trainee shaman shook his head and turned to examine the control panels scattered around them. He made a surprised sound.

"What?" she asked, finishing with a last shot of the double door airlock leading to the canister storage room.

"Well, that panel over there –" he pointed without looking – "seems to be monitoring the conditions inside the storage room."

Laura looked over at the panel. "'Emergency airflow.' 'Outside vents?'" She felt her skin crawl as she realized the implications of that last.

Standing Wolf hadn't been warning her of chemical leaks with his last image of the red cloud crawling down the mountain slope. These people were prepared to *deliberately* release the chemical poisons to the outside. Depending on the chemical agent used, they might be trapping themselves inside the complex when they released the poisons, but fanatics could put up with a little inconvenience.

She shook herself. "See any lists or labels for what's stored in there? Mustard gas? Nerve gas?"

Greg flipped through clipboards hanging on one side of the window. "Ah, here's a map." He frowned. "Must be in code. Some stacks are labelled GB and others VX. No other initials."

Laura felt the chill deepen as she remembered the articles on nerve poisons she had read on the plane. "That's no code. Those are the two newest nerve agents. They work almost instantly." She recalled the articles she had read on the plane. "GB is designed to kill when inhaled. It disperses in a cloud that dissipates in just a few hours. VX settles on the ground with a consistency like motor oil; it kills not only by being inhaled but by skin contact and it's lethal for weeks. But these are stored in liquid form. How do they expect to convert it to gas?" She looked back into the storage room but saw nothing to answer her question. She snapped a picture of the incriminating panel as she tried to think of what to do. "I'm the wrong person for this. Mac – even Celia – could rig these controls to –" She shook her head. "We've got to get Mac here. Unless you could –"

Greg studied the controls and shook his head. "Not me, either. Unless –" He moved to the panel beside the airlock and pried it open. "It looks like this is the only entrance to that room. I could maybe rig this so that they couldn't open the doors without a lot of repair first."

Laura smiled. "Hey, I can do damage like that, too. Need some help?"



"Comon, Laura," Mac muttered as he jiggled the small bundle in his hand and stared up at the opening. "I could use some help here." He could only hope that she hadn't been caught. If only they had dared risk bringing communication gear like

what she and J.J. had had in the lab. Then at least he'd know she was all right.

He sighed and turned to look at his relative. McIver scowled back at him from his position against the wall. "You were able to make yourself heard over the phone," he tried, "so what's so different about vibrating air molecules?"

McIver pointed at Mac's head, and the blond sighed. "Yeah, it's all in my head." Lack of skill at charades was obviously hereditary. So far all they had been able to establish was that the bundle did *not* contain gold, although Mac still wasn't allowed to open it and see what it did contain. Scanning the floor for a patch of sand or dirt that he could use for writing, he walked right past the gesturing McIver and suddenly saw it.

The body leaned against the wall, the hat tipped forward over the face as if death had overtaken him in his sleep. The clothing was still intact, although the body itself, judging from the handbones protruding from the sleeves, was a skeleton.

McIver sighed gustily and pushed his hat back as MacGyver, stricken, turned toward the spirit. "You never left here. I'm sorry." McIver hesitantly reached out and patted him reassuringly on the shoulder. Mac only felt the slightest suggestion of cold from the light contact.

That small gesture affected him more than seeing the body. He *had* to find some way to communicate. Blinking rapidly, he pulled out his roll of duct tape and started cutting small strips with the scissors attachment of his Swiss army knife. Working rapidly, he stuck the strips to the flattest part of the crevice wall he could find, forming crude letters of the alphabet.

He stood back, frowning. The tape probably wouldn't stick long – some letters were already falling off the wall – but it didn't need to stay up forever. And the tape showed up better in his goggled vision than scratching in the dirt would have. "There," he said, urging the spirit forward, "you can point to the letters and I can read what you want to say."

McIver looked from the letters to him with an unreadable expression. He pointed at letters. D-I-D-N-O-T-W-A-N-T-Y-O-U-T-O-S-E-E-N-O-F-U-S-S-N-O-F-A-N-C-Y-F-U-N-E-R-A-L

"No fuss, no fancy funeral. Okay." MacGyver nodded. He hefted the bag. "What's this?"

M-E-D-I-C-I-N-E-B-U-N-D-L-E-T-H-I-S-T-O-O-S-L-O-W Mclver stalked away, muttering soundlessly.

MacGyver sighed. What he needed was a ghost phone.

He thought about what he had on hand. The chemical weapons protection kit, the nightvision goggles — He pulled those off and shone his penlight on it. A headstrap harness, a set of binoculars that converged to form a six-inch tube with lenses, containing a diode that emitted infrared light. The headstrap harness could be useful, but Laura would be furious.

He emptied his pockets and stopped as he came to the ancient knife. It seemed to tingle against his skin and, as he glanced toward Mclver, he noticed that the spirit was muttering again. A certain pattern of shapes came to mind, and Mac rejected the idea for only a moment. "Oh well, it's all in my head anyway." He pulled out his roll of duct tape.

Laura glanced around the corner and pulled back into the intersecting corridor. "We can't get by *that* many," she told Greg. "We have to find another way out of here."

"Grandfather will distract them," Greg replied confidently.

"Huh. I thought the whole point of a quest was proving what you could do without your mentor's interference."

"Grandfather constantly interferes."

She caught sight of a familiar buckskinned figure back the way they had come, two doors down from the control room entrance. "Looks like Grandfather has other ideas than just leaving us yet. Come on."

"The idea is," MacGyver explained to himself and his relative as he worked, "since these items are supposed to help you keep in contact with me, they might also help you contact me." He checked the connections, ignoring the pacing spirit. Large

blade inside tube from chain necklace — heavily taped to stay put and not cut him — awl taped to circular pendant — ditto. He tied the leather thong around his head and adjusted his new headset so that the circular pendant hung over his ear. He fingered the tube by his jaw and tried not to think of how improbable it looked. "There, can you hear me now?"

"Hear you?" an irritated voice protested in his ear. "I've never had any problems hearing you!"

MacGyver smiled widely in relief. "Yeah, well, I don't have any problems now, either. So why don't you fill me in on the details?"



have a problem with a door marked 'Danger. Weak Ceiling'," Laura complained as they closed the offending door behind them. "And where did Standing Wolf go to now? He did come in here, right?"

Greg flicked the light switch on before Laura could protest and two floodlights at the back of the room came on a second after the overhead light. "Oh wow, talk about expanding," Laura commented.

The back wall of the room was the mountain itself. Holes were punched into the rock at several points, and, to judge from the pickaxes and jackhammers leaning against the wall, the base was growing deeper into the mountain.

"I think we're expected to dig our way out, Laura." Greg pointed at the closer of the six-foot openings. A wolf poked its snout out of the opening, grinned at them, then turned tail and vanished.

Laura fished a pair of safety glasses and a flashlight out of boxes by the door. "Ever handle a jackhammer before? Now's your chance to learn."



hat there's a medicine bundle," Mclver explained. "Sometimes they're passed on from generation to generation, growing more and more powerful. This one belonged to a friend of mine, and I promised to get it back when the Bozer brothers stole it — thinking it was full of gold or something. The trail led to the hole-in-the-wall gang; I reckon the Bozers ran into the gang and bragged at the wrong time."

"Sounds like the Bozer brothers," MacGyver agreed, remembering the pair from his dreams.

Mclver snorted. "Well, as you saw, I wasn't able to get it back to my friend. And it's powerful – it's partly the reason why I was able to contact you. It's taken me a long time to learn to use it, but if I could use it, so could others. I couldn't let it fall into *their* hands." He jerked his thumb toward the other occupants of the mountain. "I've had a looksee around their place. That poison is leaking; I've been able to keep it from causing mischief, but what those people are planning to do –" He shuddered and shook his head. "I couldn't risk it."

"Well, I appreciate the warning about this site; it definitely should be looked into. But what makes you think that they would have found that?"

Mclver stomped back to the wall and flung himself against it. "Because they're digging *this* way."

As if on cue, a small hole appeared in the wall four feet past him. Mclver stared at it, his expression a strange mixture of outrage and surprise. The hole widened, and a beam of light shone through. "Laura, look at this," an unfamiliar voice said.

"Laura?" Mac couldn't believe his ears. "What are you doing in there?"

"Mac? Wait a minute. C'mon, Greg, let's get this open."

He could hear the bite of pickaxes and soon, in a shower of rock and dust, there was an opening large enough for Laura to enter. Coughing from the dust as she stepped through, she shone her flashlight around the crevice. "Whew. I'll bet if they had realized this was here, they wouldn't have stopped when they did."

"I stopped them," Mclver grumbled.

"Ah, so that's why the jackhammer wouldn't work. Mac, this is Greg. Greg, MacGyver and Mclver, if you can see him."

MacGyver turned to see a young Native American, his clothing and hair gray with rock dust, straighten after stepping through the opening. He nodded gravely to MacGyver after a startled glance

at his head and, like Laura, shone the large flashlight he carried about the crevice.

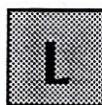
The light from the flashlights did not go well with the goggles. Pushing those up, Mac looked into the opening and saw a short tunnel leading back to a brightly lit room. No wonder Mclver had been so persistent at contacting him.

He returned his attention to the crevice and noticed that Greg had found the empty hiding place. The young man fingered one of the fragments of rock that had sealed the opening, then rose to his feet and turned his flashlight upon Mclver. "Are you the thief?" he demanded.

"No, he is a good and true friend." Standing Wolf emerged from the shadows behind Laura to face Greg. "He guarded past life itself and summoned others to continue."

Mclver squinted at the shaman. "Who are you?"

Standing Wolf smiled sadly at the other spirit. "You do not know me, my friend?"



Laura studied the spirits closely, feeling the hairs on the back of her neck rise. "Mclver, this is Standing Wolf."

The veteran shook his head. "I'm not doubting you, Miss Laura, but this is not Standing Wolf!"

The shaman smiled ... and changed, growing younger – even younger than Greg. His buckskins changed to a loose blue shirt and leggings and his long hair was braided into two plaits.

Mclver's face lit up. "That's the Standing Wolf I know." He went up to the spirit. "I'm sorry I couldn't return your grandfather's medicine bundle to you. I tried – I got it away from them – but I just couldn't get it to you." He studied the young shaman, his face a mixture of sadness and joy. "I was so afraid that you would die from your wounds before I could get it back to you."

"I survived, with your friends' help. We were all much saddened when you did not return."

MacGyver cleared his throat as he approached Greg. "I think you're looking for this." He held out a small brown leather bundle.

Greg looked surprised. He reached for the bundle.

Laura, glancing back and forth between the two pairs, watched as the spirits vanished. For an instant, she saw glowing outlines of the veteran and the shaman around their living representatives just as the bundle changed hands, then the spirits and the power she had sensed were gone, and the crevice was lit only by the flashlights she and Greg had taken from the installation.

Greg looked from the bundle to MacGyver. "Did you just feel —"

An alarm blasted from the opening leading to the installation. "Canister leak," a tinny voice announced over a distant loudspeaker, almost drowned out by the alarm. "Canister leak."

MacGyver and Laura exchanged glances. "He said he had it controlled!"

"Yes, but he isn't here now!"

"But I am," a new voice announced. They turned toward the opening to see a guard in the tunnel pointing a rifle at them. "I thought I saw you two intruders by the control room. Now, why don't you all come right back this way." He swung the rifle straight at MacGyver. "I can't miss at this range."

MacGyver shrugged and raised his hands. Laura and Greg followed suit. The guard backed up a bit into the tunnel, still keeping MacGyver in his sights, when he suddenly swung the rifle far to the right to point at the older Standing Wolf. "Where did you come from?"

MacGyver gestured at Laura and shoved Greg with him against the wall and out of the guard's vision. Rattled, the guard shot at the spirit, who merely raised an eyebrow. Standing Wolf winked out, but the sound of the shot echoed. Close upon the last echo came an ominous rumbling from overhead. Glancing upward, the guard paled and scrambled back through the tunnel just as a fall of rocks cascaded where he had been standing. Within moments the opening was sealed.

"Mac!" Laura turned her light against the wall, where small stones and dust were still sliding down and caught Mac and Greg in its beam, backing away from the weakened side. The beam

also revealed a curious dark huddle at the base of the wall, just as it was buried under a second rockfall. She froze, watching as dust gently drifted down. McIver had been leaning there, she remembered. She was suddenly certain she had just seen the burial of his remains.

Greg's shoulders slumped as he saw the sealed opening. "We're not going out that way."

"Nope," Mac agreed. He pointed up. "We're going out that-a-way."

Greg swung his light in the direction MacGyver indicated and squinted. "What is *that*?"

"It's what's going to let you climb out of this crevice," Laura argued. She waited while Greg shrugged and started toward the best handholds before backing up to MacGyver. "Sheesh, Mac, I've seen you whip up some weird contraptions, but that trapeze doesn't look at all safe." She grinned. "Should be fun."

He grinned back at her.

She looked closely at him. "And what is that on your head?"

MacGyver sighed and pulled off what she belatedly recognized as pieces of the apports. "Long story."

"I'll bet. Worked, though, huh?" At his answering sheepish expression, she shook her finger at him before turning to start up the wall. "Remember, you owe me full details!"



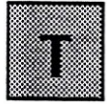
MacGyver and Laura edged cautiously down the slope, Greg having departed in another direction after helping Laura out of the crevice opening. Mac hoped the young man's night vision was good; he knew he would have had a difficult time just descending the slope without the nightvision goggles.

They could hear an alarm blaring from the direction of the cliff-face, but there didn't seem to be any sounds of pursuit yet. When they were within sight of the cliff-face, MacGyver climbed a suitable tree to scan the complex's entrance. None of those milling about the entrance seemed to be wearing nightvision goggles, although some wore gas masks, while others did not. "Uh-oh," he reported. "Definitely time to move. A very dusty

guard just came out, and he's pointing back toward the crevice."

"I hope no one found the Jeep," Laura worried as he started down the tree. "Come to think of it," she added as he dropped from the last branch, "I hope *you* can remember where you moved it."

"We'll find it. Now keep close to me and watch out for the triplines!"



he voice on the speaker phone was more resigned than disbelieving. "And the base was completely deserted when you returned."

"Yeah," Mac said disgustedly. "Everything gone – and the interior of the bunkhouse looked like it hadn't been touched in decades. Only things they hadn't cleared out were the canisters, and I gather that that was because the airlock was jammed." He looked aside at Laura.

She buffed her nails against her shoulder. "Hey, I'm good at destruction."

"I can vouch for that," J.J. agreed.

"If we had given them any more time, though," MacGyver resumed, "they would have cleaned that room out as well." He sighed and paced away from Laura's desk. "C'mon, Pete, you know all this. I'm sure someone on the team was giving you direct-line feeds when they entered." He was tired of repeating himself, Laura knew. As they both were. They had spent most of the morning trying to find someone in authority to move until the Foundation was able to step in, and by the time the raid on the base had been organized, it was too late. When the blaming and counterblaming had begun, she had convinced Mac to return with her to the university.

"Yeah," Peter Thornton agreed. "It was a good thing you both took pictures; those are enabling us to keep our side of the investigation open. The Army brass are going quietly mad trying to explain how the canisters got there – those that are still talking to me, that is. Are you sure there isn't anything else you haven't told me?"

"Nothing more I can say, Pete." Mac glanced aside at Laura. By mutual agreement, they were leaving out any mention of Standing Wolf and his apprentice. Greg had gone his way on the

mountainside, while they had headed for the Jeep and the nearest phone. Still, Laura could sympathize with Peter.

"Well, I'm no expert on the military," she commented, "but it didn't *feel* like a regular base. I mean, all the guards wore uniforms, but I don't remember any insignia."

"That area is also known for paramilitary groups." Peter sighed. "Did you know that they had rigged vents to release nerve gas on the outside in case they were ever found?"

"I know," Laura whispered, remembering both her dream and the control panel.

Mac and J.J. both glanced supportively at her as Peter went on, unhearing. "I'm glad we didn't have to face that kind of standoff. Fortunately, all the outside vents had been covered by landslides."

A startled expression crossed MacGyver's face. He mouthed "Mclver?"

Laura nodded as Peter continued, "The techs say that they have never seen so much frayed and shorted-out wiring as they did in walls around that room and the one your pictures show to be the control room."

Laura raised her eyebrows. Mclver had been one busy little ghost. Landslides, frayed wiring which probably had all shorted out at the same moment, a protective Medicine shield holding in leaking poisons, jackhammers out of operation – to have all those little details going on at the same time he was contacting MacGyver *and* throwing things at his descendant spoke of intense planning. She wouldn't have been surprised to learn that her and Greg's little contribution hadn't been necessary to block the airlock and the removal of the canisters. And who knew what else Mclver had been doing to "discourage" the residents of "the hole in the wall"? She wouldn't have put it past him to have done some "ghostly hauntings" schtick as well.

"Maybe that's why whoever it was decided to clear out," Peter finished, unconsciously echoing her thoughts. "But they sure left us a mess to clean up. Still, it's better than having those canisters in their hands – whoever they were. Good work, everyone."

MacGyver glanced at J.J. and Laura before responding, "Thanks, Pete."

"So, Mac, does this mean you might consider working for the Foundation again?" Even Laura could detect the undertone of pleading in Peter's voice.

MacGyver grinned. "I'll think about it, Pete. Right now I've got a lot of sleep to catch up on. Doctor's orders," he added, glancing aside at J.J., who pointed at the time. "And a hockey game to catch. I'll be in touch, Pete."

It was only long after the goodbyes had been said and the office door had closed behind MacGyver that J.J. suddenly snapped his fingers. "Damn. I still didn't find out about the dog whistle."

Call for Papers: Reprise #1

The X Files

"C'mon, Mulder – give."

Fox Mulder stuffed his hands into his trousers pockets and glared sullenly at Byers. The two men stared one another down until finally Byers shrugged and turned away. "Suit yourself."

"Face it, Mulder – we're not going to help until you tell us why. Unless of course you'd like to give me Scully's home number," suggested Frohike with a stage leer.

"Thought you could hack into telephone company records," Mulder replied, surprised.

"I can. But unlike our government, I prefer to honor the lady's privacy. After a fashion, of course," Frohike answered with a predatory grin.

"In other words, you already have it, you just want permission to use it."

Frohike grinned wider in response.

"Obviously this has something to do with the X-Files, Mulder, or you wouldn't be here. And if it were 'official', Scully'd be with you. So ... what is it?"

"Yeah, is it likely to get us arrested?" asked Langly eagerly.

Reluctantly, Mulder told them. The silence that followed his announcement forced a blush down Mulder's collar and up his ears.

Dana Scully smiled pleasantly but anonymously to her co-workers as she moved quickly through the lobby of the Washington headquarters of the FBI. She hefted her briefcase and made her way to the basement elevator. The friendly smiles directed at her faded slightly as her destination registered, but she'd become used to that. As she waited for the elevator to open, she decided, as she usually did, that it was their loss, not hers.

Traffic in the basement hallways was always sparse, and this morning was no exception. This morning was just like any other, except ... ah, that was it. She couldn't smell the coffee brewing. Mulder must have overslept. Either that, or ...

She found him asleep at his desk, head resting on his outflung arm. His computer screen flickered softly, casting his face in a weird blue-white light. Smiling gently at the vagaries of her partner's peculiar sleeping habits, Scully set her briefcase down quietly, and went into the small kitchen area to make coffee.

A few minutes later, she reentered the office, coffee cup in hand, and found Mulder still snoozing. Just what had he been working on? she wondered. She stepped over to his desk, and looked over his sleeping form at the words etching themselves into his monitor's tube.

"Guest list? Mulder!" she cried. He jerked awake, flinging himself back in his chair and slamming his head into Scully's elbow, sending her coffee fountaining out of her cup. Drenched in hot coffee, Mulder yelped, backpedalling his office chair toward the wall, and Scully suddenly found herself unceremoniously dumped on her backside.

"Wha-a-a? Scully!"

"Mulder, what're you up to?" Scully demanded from the floor.

"What're you doing on the floor?" Mulder practically squeaked, goggling down at her.

"What're you doing hacking into Georgetown Institute?"

Mulder's hands flew ineffectually toward the monitor to mask it, but the gesture was reflex. He blushed crimson, stammering denials that died out almost immediately. He'd been caught with his hand in the proverbial cookie jar, and Scully's grim expression promised no forgiveness.

"Knock it off, Mulder. And help me up," she commanded, holding out her hand to him.

Finally achieving her feet once more, Scully dusted herself off, planted her fists on her hips, and glared down at Mulder. "So – what's your excuse, hmm?"

Mulder dragged his hand through his coffee-dampened hair, and shrugged. If he was attempting boyish charm, the spiky look of his hair and the haggard cast of his eyes didn't help the illusion. Scully remained firm. "Using Bureau resources to hack into a private educational institution, Mulder?"

"Just the file — the Lone Gunmen helped me hack in and download it from their place. I brought it back on a floppy."

"Involving civilians, too. In a flagrant invasion of privacy — or did you bother to get a search warrant before attempting this?"

"Ah, come on — it was there on their VAX. It's not like I broke into a secure installation —"

"On their VAX. On a public ftp site?"

"Well, no. In a private account. I just had to know, Scully —" he protested.

"Know what, Mulder?"

"Know who's been invited. Scully, this is going to be amazing! I've done some background checks on some of these people — people even I have never heard of before. I don't know how Moorhouse does it — her resources must be incredible," he told her excitedly.

Scully had to smile; the boyish charm act had failed, but the passionate acolyte got her every time. "Who's been invited, then?"

"Look at this," he invited, gesturing toward the screen as he pressed a function key to call up another file. "Kwai Chang Caine. I've heard of him — he's a Shaolin priest. And apparently a Shambhalla master. Do you have any idea how rare that is? This guy's got abilities that would blow you away, Scully."

"Looks like that guy in the Lipton iced tea commercials," Scully observed, frowning doubtfully over the dossier Mulder had called up. "Who else?"

A quick press of keys brought up another screen, this time with a young man with dark hair and a ready smile. "Michael Burton. LAPD. I did some cross-referencing on him. I think he's had a near-

death experience. I think he might be able to talk to the dead."

"Talk to the dead?" Scully repeated uneasily. She'd already had one unsettling experience with Boggs, who'd claimed to speak with the dead.

"He's solved some pretty obscure crimes, has quite a track record."

"That *could* mean he's a good cop, you know, Mulder. It doesn't have to be anything supernatural."

"No," Mulder admitted. "But some of the cases he's broken, he could only have done it with inside information that was available to the victim."

"Hmm. Well. Anyone else of interest?"

"Well, I've always wanted to meet the Ghostbusters. And there's this archaeologist guy, Dr. Henry Jones, Jr. Goes by the name 'Indiana'. He's had a fascinating career. His father was a Grail scholar."

Scully picked up her coffee cup and looked at it absently, suddenly feeling like a decent cup of coffee was as hard to find as the Holy Grail.

"And then there's Ian Matheson — a dyed in the wool skeptic who suddenly turned into a believer a few years ago — I'd like you to meet him, Scully. Find out what it was that changed his mind."

"Isn't he the guy who wrote that book ... *Satan's Sex Slaves*? Mulder, big bucks is what changed his mind — he's made a fortune off that book. Not to mention his syndicated talk show —"

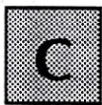
"You watch *How Strange*? Scully, I'm surprised at you! You'll have to hand in your charter membership in Pragmatics Anonymous."

"Very funny, Mulder. Look, we've got a full caseload today — why don't you clean yourself up and we can get to work?"

Mulder glanced wistfully at the files on the screen, then nodded. "It's gonna be a great conference, Scully. I can't wait!"

The Truth Is Out There

by Pat Ritter



Chinatown — Philadelphia, PA

The evening was lit with street lamps and bright neon hawking smoked duck and Beijing newspapers. The restaurants were just feeling their evening crush as the commuters settled in for lo mein and soup to wait out the rush hour traffic worsened by the transit strike. The illicit dealers took advantage of the increase in car and pedestrian traffic, since the heavily congested streets made it harder for the police to enforce the narcotics laws.

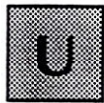
"So Chou, what do you have for me tonight?" Asked a well-dressed Chinese man as he stepped from his car into the nearly deserted alley.

Chou looked around nervously as he dug deeply into his trouser pocket and extracted a thick roll of bills. "Your money for the ice, Mr. Tsang. I was able to undercut Li and still net you a profit."

Paiji Tsang took the roll and pocketed it while extending his empty hand toward the open window of his car. There was no need to count it, he made sure word got around about when someone tried to shave a little for himself. From inside the car, he was handed a small, brown-paper package. "Good. Here is your next batch plus your percentage. I will find you again." He got into the car and it pulled away from the curb.

Chou tucked the nondescript package under his arm and cut through an adjoining alley. At first he took the faint skittering noise behind him to be rats and ignored it. When it grew louder, he pulled out his knife with his free hand and turned toward the noise.

He was unable to scream before the greenish glow was upon him.



University City

"And the big story on Action News tonight — The transit worker strike is

well into its second week with talks scheduled to resume tomorrow ..."

I paid scarce heed to the news as I skimmed my mail (Miss McCarthy, you may have won ...!) and rooted about in the fridge. My cat stuck her nose in to see if there was anything that would make an appropriate kitty snack. "Sorry, girl, you're getting meow food," I informed her as I pushed her aside.

"In Chinatown, another body was found brutally murdered last night. All the victims so far have been Chinese-American males with records of drug dealings. Olivia Chan has more on this from Chinatown ..."

The refrigerator yielded a container of mystery meal and another wrapped package resembled meat-cake (is it meat or is it cake?). "Mmm, looks yummy," I commented grabbing a soda, calm in the knowledge that it was indeed what it said on the can.

Not feeling brave, and too lazy to actually cook (Heavens!), I decided to eat out, after hitting Chinatown for some Tiger Balm (I'd pulled a muscle I'd rather not think about trying some fancy stunts on my rollerblades). I gave Chaim, an old roomie's ex (got along better with him than the roomie), a call and asked him to meet me downtown.

"With the baseball strike ended, spring training has begun in Clearwater ..."

I didn't really care about baseball, so turned off the TV, grabbed a jacket, and headed to the other part of the city. By the time I hit 30th Street, the pedestrian traffic was only marginally more passable than the vehicular. About the only good thing about the transit strike was that people were getting more exercise.

It took me a lot longer than usual to get to Chinatown. Traffic was thinning out by then and a few stores were starting to close. Most shops in Center City closed shortly after the end of the business day, when anyone who'd be shopping would be heading home. Many were taking advantage of the strike and staying open a little later. The store I wanted was open until 10 pm most days anyway, and as I went up the steps my footsteps crunched. I looked down and saw that the top step and the doorway were covered in rice with red, pea-sized beads mixed in.

When I opened the door and walked in, the air was a little thicker than usual. Normally there would be incense burning, sometimes a little thicker around Chinese holidays, but not this strong. My eyes began to water as I walked over to the remedies and grabbed a jar of red tiger balm.

"Little more incense than usual, Mrs. Kwon?" I commented as I paid for the liniment.

"There is *kiang-shi* about," she told me while giving me my change. "It is not safe to be out at night. Wait here, please." She was more talkative than usual, normally she just gave me a smile. She stepped from behind the counter, went to the back of the store and came back with a small package wrapped in red tissue paper and tied with a red chord. "You are good customer, wear this. It keep evil away."

I pocketed my tiger balm and took the red packet. "Thank you." The strong smell emanating from the amulet was reminiscent of garlic. Chinese mythology was not one of my strong points, I had no idea what kind of evil spirit garlic was supposed to be a ward against. I draped the chord around my neck; if anything, it would make for interesting telling when I met up with Chaim.

"There you are, thought I missed you," greeted a familiar figure. He stood about my height with scraggly brown hair and wire-rimmed glasses. His denim jacket was open over an *X-Files* T-shirt that had been tucked into weathered khakis. "What's that smell?" he asked while he adjusted his jacket cuffs as though they were Armani instead of Levi.

"Eau de garlic, I think." I held the amulet near his nose. "Supposed to keep away evil."

"Keep away your friends, too. Are you going to wear that all night?" he asked as we crossed 10th and cut down Cherry Street. Then the weirdness set in and I was saved from giving him an answer. We were hardly down Cherry Street when we saw a green glow ahead. It entered into a doorway which we were going to have to pass to get to 9th street. Part of me wanted to know what was causing it, while the smart part had no desire to find out in case it was related to the *kiang-shi* the shopkeeper mentioned.

When we were within a few feet of the doorway, a sound reached us that made me want to run, if

only my feet didn't suddenly turn to lead. It sounded like chicken bones popping, when you're taking it apart to throw it onto the grill. That doesn't seem like it could be too bad, but I knew that chicken bones don't make that much noise and the cut-off scream was most definitely human.

"C'mon Floyd," Chaim said, grabbing my arm and breaking my trance. "I don't know what that was, and I don't think we want to know. Let's get out of here."

I was inclined to agree. Something that glowed green and ripped people apart wasn't something I wanted to meet. I wished Chris was here, there wasn't much that frightened him.

Chaim had turned back toward 10th, I was still facing the direction of the doorway, when I saw the glow again. It looked to be hopping in our direction. My only thought was, "Great, I'm going to be killed by a demon pooka."

It was close enough for me to see something that looked human with long talons, wild hair, and serrated teeth when it snarled at me. I figured a few more hops and that would be it, no more weirdness for me. A gunshot, which drove off the creature, startled me so badly I nearly knocked over Chaim.

"You didn't see it, did you?" I asked as I recovered my balance and composure.

He shook his head. "No. But there is someone walking toward us with a gun."

Striding purposefully toward us was someone with a gun in one hand while digging about in his pocket with the other. He stopped in front of us and flipped open his wallet. Opposite his badge was a photo ID. "Detective Sam Lino, homicide." He looked to be one of those plainclothesmen who consider Brooks Brothers for dress down day. Not a Peter Caine type, more like Brandon Lee's character in *Showdown in Little Tokyo*. "What are you doing here? Don't you know a murderer has been stalking the area the past few nights?"

"Ah, no," I replied weakly. "I don't watch the news much." Watching the news wasn't something I regularly did. Usually it was turned on and tuned out until the weather forecast.

"I have," Chaim began. "According to their reports, two bodies have been found torn limb from limb in this area. The only thing they had in common, aside from the dismemberment, was possible connection to the same gang."

"What are you wearing around your neck?" he asked me as he put away his badge. He still had his gun out, which made me nervous.

"Garlic," I replied, feeling a bit foolish at the admission.

"Olivia Kwon gave you this, didn't she?" His reply took me by surprise.

"If she's a shopkeeper," I nodded toward her store, "then yes. What is going on here?"

"Her son was my partner, Jack Kwon. He disappeared earlier this week." I wasn't quick enough to hide my surprise. "Who are you? Let me see some ID."

The gun he held in his had inspired us to comply. We dug in our respective pockets and handed him our IDs. He looked them over and handed them back.

"I'm investigating these murders and I would like to ask you a few questions. If you'll come with me?" We knew better than to argue with a Philly cop.

He led the way to one of those hole-in-the-wall restaurants that seem to prevail in Chinatown. When we walked in he said something to the host in Chinese and led the way to a booth in the back. Our host put a pot of tea on the table and left.

"What do you know about these murders?" He asked us.

Chaim looked at me, I shook my head. "Just what we've told you."

"Mrs. Kwon said something about a *kiang-shi* when she gave me the garlic. I'm inclined to believe her."

"Why?"

"I think I've seen it." Had to give him credit, he didn't flinch the way most people do when they think I'm full of it.

"When?" Chaim asked.

"While you were dragging me back to 10th street. That green glow we saw?" He nodded. "It came with a B-movie monster."

"Oh, come on Floyd. You've got to be kidding."

I shrugged. "Hey, that's what I saw. You know, 'There are stranger things in heaven and earth ...'."

"Can you describe it?" Officer Lino asked. I told him what I saw. He nodded. "My grandmother used to tell me stories when I was little," he resumed. "She told a winner about a spirit of a murdered man who had to revenge his death. He had been killed by Tong men who tried to take his land. He came back as a *kiang-shi* and killed the men one by one."

He piqued my interest. "Mrs. Kwon mentioned *kiang-shi* when she gave me the garlic. What is it?"

"You might call it a vampire, but it is more than that."

"A *vampire*? You can't be serious." Even though Chaim doubted him, I knew better. With all the weird things I've seen, I've learned that anything is possible.

And I had seen it. "Let me guess. They glow green and hop?" He nodded.

"Loud noises are supposed to bother them. Rather than risk hitting you, I just tried to scare it away."

"Why haven't the police done something sooner?" I asked Officer Lino.

He shrugged. "Red tape. DAs want people they can prosecute, not mythical creatures that don't exist."

"Do you think the *kiang-shi* could be your partner?"

"Why?" He rewarded me with the disbelief that he'd hid before.

"What happened to your partner?"

"He never showed up for work in the morning. Then these murders started and I've been pulling double-shifts since."

"How long between the time your partner disappeared and the murders started?"

He thought for a moment. "I guess the next day. You're saying that the killer is Jack getting revenge?"

I shrugged. "Why not? Didn't you mention a revenge story before?"

"It's probably some rival gang using the myth to get even," Chaim offered. "A little makeup and glow-in-the-dark paint and you have a monster."

"You didn't see it," I reprimanded.

"Okay, let's say it is a *kiang-shi*," Officer Lino allowed. "Do you have any suggestions on how we can catch or kill it?"

"I guess the library." I replied, thinking of Chris and how he picked the wrong time to go overseas. Not only was he the man in my life, but he's a package of weirdness in himself. He's been creeping around since before Bram Stoker put pen to paper, and told me once he met that odd Irishman. That was not something he let be generally known, and with my reputation for fantastic stories, I wasn't going to tell anyone either. But it would have been nice to have some undead help on my side.

I sighed. The only other person I could think of who would be more qualified was Kenhelm. He had tried to get a grant from the state of New Jersey to hunt down the Jersey Devil, and had almost succeeded. But he had the 9-to-5 job (some people graduate on time) and it had sent him to Brownsville for the month.

"So, Chaim, what'cha doing tomorrow?"

He pulled back. "Me? I have enough problems, I don't need to get the Tong after me."

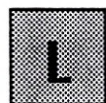
"It's not the Tong, it's a *kiang-shi*. Much worse." I gave him a twisted grin. "Trust me."

He gave me a look of resigned defeat. "You're getting even with me for not believing you about

the zoo, isn't it?" I nodded. "All right, I'll go along with it. What do we do first?"

"Call a cab."

When the cab came, Chaim gave the driver his address. "You can crash at my place," he had said while we were waiting for our ride. I thought I saw something green duck behind a building when the cab pulled up, but I wasn't sure and didn't want to go look. "We can hit the library when it opens tomorrow."



ogan Circle

For as long as I can remember, going to the library was something I always enjoyed. From an early age I had a love affair with the printed word and could easily lose a day wrapped in the pages of a well-crafted book. When I moved into the city, I would always forsake the campus library to come here to the main branch of the Philadelphia Library to do my research.

"This way," I said leading Chaim up the marble stairs and down a long hallway. I had done an in-depth report on witch hunts (and I don't mean the McCarthy ones) so knew which department would have what we needed.

"What if I'm right and this is nothing more than a gang war?"

"Ahm, can you run fast?" I dropped my books on the table and began paging through.

"I'm serious. I've been shot at before and let me tell you, it's not something I'm looking forward to experiencing again."

"You won't be shot at," I told him pushing a stack at him. "You didn't see it, I did. It's not human, whatever it is."

"Oh, yes, and you're an expert on this sort of thing."

I scowled at him. I didn't expect to be believed all the time, I just wish he was a little more open-minded. "Here we go," he continued ignoring me. "The *kiang-shi* arose following a violent death due to suicide, hanging, drowning, or smothering.¹ Assuming you're right, it sounds as though Officer Kwon would have been

murdered." He flipped a couple pages. "Not that I believe you or anything."

"How about this, 'Garlic ... kept vampires away ... rice and red peas created barriers to the entry of the vampire.'²⁴"

"Who would have guessed garlic as a repellent?" he muttered. "Have you found out how to kill it yet?"

"Yeah, I think so. 'If the vampire reached its transformative stage as the flying hairy creature, only thunder or a bullet could bring it down.'³ That explains why it ran away when Officer Lino shot at it." I read a little more. "Though by now it might take more than just bangers to get rid of it."

"M-80s," Chaim whispered while pretending to be reading. "I'll get 'em."

I leaned close. "Where ...?"

He put his finger to his lips and looked left. I followed his glance and saw the uniform standing at the information desk. He scrawled some more notes and handed me the page before taking his stack of books back to the desk. In amongst the notes on the *kiang-shi* was scrawled, "Meet me at the Arch at sunset." I looked at my watch. It was just after noon. I had a whole day to kill before I was to meet Chaim.

I decided to head back to the alley and see if there was anything left behind that could be useful, like phosphorescent fabric or plastic claws. One of the few times when I'd be glad to be wrong.

When I reached the neighborhood, there was a police car blocking Cherry Street at 10th. I got as close as I could and saw a couple official-looking people poking about and picking up things with tweezers and putting things into little zip-loc bags. I wonder ...

"Excuse me," I called as I walked past the police car. I had my notebook out and pencil poised ready to take notes. "I'm from the Drexel University *Triangle*. I hear that there was another killing last night that might be related to the Chinatown murders."

"Go away," threatened an officer coming toward me. When he got closer I recognized him. "It's

you," he replied in recognition. "Did you find out anything?"

I nodded. "They're not nice creatures for starters. They have a bad habit of ripping their victims apart. And they're most dangerous when they are glowing green and covered in long white hair. I think we're in trouble."

He brushed that aside. "Did you find out what will kill it? That's the important thing."

I pulled out my notes. "Loud noises, like thunder, and bullets. Though one article said something about being able to sweep it away." I grimaced. "Not me."

He smoothed his hair. "We can't wait until the next storm, it's likely to strike again tonight."

"We'll supply the thunder," I offered, "if you can supply the bullets."

He nodded. "When and where?"

"I know it sounds cliché, but the Arch at sundown."

"You're right, it does." He looked back to the forensic team. "I'll be there." He turned to return to work.

"Wait a sec. Did you find out anything that says I might be wrong?"

He didn't turn back. "No."



riendship Arch - Sunset

Chaim was the last to arrive and handed me a brown paper bag. "Ready to roll?"

"How are we going to find the creature?" Officer Lino asked. They both looked toward me for advice.

"I dunno. Any idea if this gang has a headquarters or hangout or anything?"

"The leader of the gang was Paiji Tsang." Lino lead the way down 10th street as he talked. "I think Jack's brother was involved with them as well, which may be why Jack was killed." His pace picked up with the waning of the last of the

sunlight. We turned left and waited. "Now that I'm relatively sure that Jack's death was related to the Tong, I want to see if we can follow little brother to the —" He watched a door open and someone go down the steps as a large car pulled up and doused its lights. "That's them, let's go." The door opened and someone got out.

I considered protesting until I caught sight of the green glow coming down out of the sky. It landed heavily on the car, trapping or killing any other occupants.

"Shit," Chaim exclaimed beside me.

"Told'ja. Gimme a couple'a the bangers."

"Freeze!" Lino called as he unholstered and cocked his gun. The creature leapt from the car and flung one of the men against a nearby wall. He crumpled like a rag doll.

The other man drew a gun and fired. The noise seemed to hurt the creature more than the bullets. Lino returned fire, still heading directly toward them. Chaim and I went around, we didn't want to be in the line of fire and may as well let the big boys distract it while we set off the bombs.

Whether by accident or on purpose, one of Lino's shots took down the gunman. We managed to light the fuses and send the bombs toward the car. Fortunately they fell short and didn't set off the car (that would have been bad for all of us). The force of all those M-80s going off in the narrow street shattered a few close windows and I was expecting my ears to start bleeding.

When I had recovered enough of my senses to make sense of what was happening, I could see blue and red flashing lights converging on the scene. Lino had cuffed the gunman he'd shot and was checking out the totaled car. All that was left of the *kiang-shi* seemed to be a couple glowing bits that were slowly fading away.



Queen's Village

"How's your hearing these days?" I asked Chaim as I approached his front steps. It had been almost two weeks since the explosion. Since then, there have been no further murders in Chinatown. Officer Lino took the blame for the damage and the credit for the collar of Paiji Tsang, the other gunman that

night. Jack Kwon's body was never recovered; I think his mother was relieved.

"What?"

"Funny." I sat down beside him to partake in some people-watching.

"Not really. I suffered some permanent damage on one side." He shrugged. "Otherwise, I'm fine."

"Got E-mail from Officer Lino." Chaim looked surprised. I was too when I saw it. "I think he found religion or something that night. It sounded like it had been written by David Carradine."

"After that incident, I might start believing your stories."

I just smiled and watched the pigeons strut on by.

1. Melton, J. Gordon, *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead* (Detroit: Visible Pres, 1994), p.98-99

2. Melton, *ibid.*

3. Melton, *ibid.*

Call for Papers: Reprise #2

The **X** Files

The remainder of the day went quietly enough; Scully dismissed the issue of hacking into GI's network with a stern admonition, accepting Mulder's promise not to do it again. Well, he really had no reason to do it again, now that he had the guest list. Of course, when the conference grew closer, he'd want to know who was really attending, and what their papers were about, but that information would probably be mailed out from the Institute to all participants. Frohike wouldn't want to incur the wrath of Dana, so Mulder wouldn't be able to turn to him for assistance getting an advance copy of the conference agenda, but he thought he could probably talk Byers into it. Or maybe he'd just call Moorhouse's office to see if it was available.

He'd attended a variety of professional conferences over the years, some stimulating and exciting in their own rights. Others had been dry, academic, and ultimately useless. Considering some of the names appearing on Moorhouse's invitation list, he suspected that those previous conferences would all pale before this one.

He didn't know what excited him more — the chance to share ideas and swap stories with literate, balanced believers and practitioners, or the opportunity to finally meet luminaries such as Kwai Chang Caine and Carl Kolchak. He felt he finally had an idea how all those Trekkies must feel going to a convention featuring William Shatner. The thought brought him a moment's disquiet — what if they felt about him the way Shatner was sometimes portrayed as feeling about his own legions of fans?

That only served to remind him that his paper topic was going to have to be a good one. He still liked the idea of a Point-Counterpoint approach, with Scully taking the role of believer and him taking the role of debunker. Scully could be a good actress when she wanted to be — you didn't get far in law enforcement if you couldn't. Combined with her analytical mind and her attention to detail ... hell, it could be great.

They'd have to pick the case carefully, though. Nothing too sensational, or she'd refuse to do it for fear of damaging her credibility. She said that she didn't mind the odd looks she got from their co-workers, or the names she knew they sometimes called her. But it pained him to see her professionalism questioned because of her association with him and the X-Files. But he could just imagine the impact her calm, cool, professional delivery of facts supporting a paranormal view would have. Electric.

These thoughts were interrupted by the buzzing of the telephone at his elbow. He snagged the receiver and tossed it up on his shoulder, locking it in place with his chin. "Mulder."

"Agent Mulder, Assistant Director Skinner would like to see you in his office, sir," replied the feminine voice of Skinner's secretary.

Mulder glanced up at the clock; it was nearly five o'clock. "What, now?"

"Now, please. He'll be waiting for you in his office — just go right in when you get here."

"You won't be there?"

"It's nearly five o'clock, Agent Mulder," she reminded him coolly.

"I'll be right there," he answered, smiling to himself, said goodbye, and hung up the phone.

"Skinner?" Scully asked, looking up from the photographs she was examining. A ring had pressed itself around her eye where she'd leaned on the jeweler's loop.

"Yeah," Mulder replied, rising and shrugging on his suit coat. Scully rose, too, reaching for her own blazer. "Just me," he pointed out, and she paused, staring at him.

"What's going on, Mulder?" she inquired, her eyes wary.

"I'll find out when I get there, I guess," he told her flippantly, straightening his tie.

"Want me to wait for you?"

Mulder considered a moment, then shook his head. "If it's anything, I'll call you at home." At

her continued look of concern, he gave her his best boyish grin and added, "It's all right. Get out of here."

She pursed her lips doubtfully, but nodded. "Call me, whichever."

"Will do."

Mulder found the office outside of Skinner's empty, the PC off and the keyboard stowed unobtrusively under the desk. Papers were stacked symmetrically in the in and out trays, the message pad had been stripped to a fresh sheet, and all of the pencils and pens had been placed carefully, points down, in the pen cup at the corner of the desk. The door to Skinner's office was ajar, so Mulder did as he'd been told, and simply walked in.

"Close the door behind you, Agent Mulder," Skinner commanded from his desk by the window. It was a neat psychological trick Skinner employed — the desk not only separated him from the agent sitting in the chair, but the size of it was also imposing. And with the sun filtering through the window behind him, he could always see his visitors clearly, while they had to shade their eyes against the glare. Too often, Skinner remained an ominous silhouette, the light glinting off his wire-rimmed glasses, making them appear opaque, shuttered. It isolated him, made him untouchable.

Usually. This time, the shades were drawn, and a warm light fell from the lamp on his desk. Skinner's shirtsleeves were rolled up almost to the elbow, and his tie was loosened at the neck; his suit coat was hung informally on the back of the chair. His glasses were folded on his desk, and he leaned back in his chair comfortably. "Have a seat, Mulder."

Mulder closed the door softly behind him and padded across the office to drop into the visitor's chair across from Skinner's desk. Not necessarily a comfortable chair, but then again, the Assistant Director wouldn't generally want people to feel at home in his inner sanctum. Mulder debated loosening his own tie, and decided that Skinner wasn't being quite *that* informal.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" Mulder inquired deferentially.

Skinner leaned back further in his chair, his hand reaching for a pen with which he toyed for a moment before replying. Finally, as if he'd just made a decision, he nodded, and sat up straighter, moving forward to rest his elbows on the desktop. Without taking his eyes off Mulder's face, he reached into his in-tray, extracted a large white envelope and slid it across the desk toward Mulder.

Mulder's eyes widened. The flat parcel bore the GI seal at its upper left-hand corner, but the addressee was definitely "Walter Skinner" in care of the FBI. Skinner's name hadn't appeared on the list he'd extracted from the GI data bank. Why would Moorhouse be inviting Walter Skinner to a paranormal conference? And just what would that mean for his own plans for the conference?

"I see from your reaction that you're familiar with this. I take it you received one, too?" Skinner asked with a deceptively mild tone.

"Yes, sir," Mulder answered flatly.

"And Agent Scully?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you're planning to attend?"

"Yes, sir — we thought, that is, it's a scholarly gathering, and —"

"That's all right, I understand, Agent Mulder," Skinner replied, and Mulder wasn't sure if he'd imagined the emphasis on the word "agent." "You do realize that any paper prepared from FBI files will have to be approved by this office."

"Uh, yes, sir," Mulder answered. In fact, he hadn't planned to vet any paper through Skinner's office since he'd suspected it wouldn't get approved. But now he had no choice, and once he told Scully, she'd probably plan to bail out on him. Mulder felt his spirits sinking exponentially. Manic depressives had nothing on him this day.

"I assume you and Agent Scully have already selected a tentative topic?"

"Well ..."

"Care to share it with me?"



"We thought we'd do a Point-Counterpoint presentation, sir. Using one of the X-File cases in our files."

"And which case do you plan to use, Agent Mulder?"

"We hadn't selected it yet, sir."

Skinner nodded thoughtfully, picking up his pen and toying with it again. "In light of recent events, your selection should be circumspect. There's no need to draw unnecessary attention to yourselves."

"With all due respect, sir —"

Skinner smiled a tight-lipped, "Don't screw with me, Mister," smile. "With all due respect, Agent Mulder, save it for when you need it. Low-key now, but convincing. This is a select audience, from what I've learned from Dr. Moorhouse. One of the genetic mutation cases, I think."

"Sir?" Mulder's eyes widened; he knew he was giving Skinner the advantage, but to discover that his superior actually knew the famed Dr. Moorhouse impressed him more than he was willing to admit.

"More plausible than hauntings. Less controversial. Maybe the fire guy."

"I'd planned Scully to take the believer role, sir — with her medical background, she's more suited to the debunker on anything relating to biology."

"Good point. You *have* given this some serious thought, then."

"Of course, sir," Mulder answered warily, unsure where this conversation was leading. In fact, he was amazed they were having this conversation at all. Then again, perhaps he shouldn't be. Skinner had shown himself to be an unexpected ally on more than one occasion, forcing Mulder to reassess his judgment of the man.

"And your choice?" Skinner inquired.

"I hadn't made one yet," Mulder allowed. "I agree it's got to be low-key. I don't care so much about my own credibility, but there's Scully's to consider —"

Skinner's eyebrow arched upward, eloquently conveying his disbelief. "Maybe the clones," was all he said.

"The clones, sir?" Mulder repeated, swallowing hard.

Skinner didn't miss the pained expression on Mulder's face, and his own became quickly apologetic. "Sorry. I meant the young girls — didn't they exhibit psychic abilities?"

"Maybe. Psychotic definitely."

"Maybe not them, then. Boggs?"

"That's still a painful subject for Scully — he promised to let her speak with her father."

"Oh. Well, think about it. And keep me advised on your progress," Skinner concluded, his voice carrying dismissal.

Mulder hesitated, then got up to go. At the door, he paused and turned back to Skinner. "Sir?"

Skinner had already returned his attention to papers on his desk. He looked up and acknowledged Mulder, "Yes, Agent Mulder?"

"About the conference. You're not going, are you, sir?"

Skinner grinned at him. "And miss hearing you disprove the existence of the paranormal? Not on your life, Agent Mulder!"

Scully was *never* going to believe this.

In the Beginning ...

compiled by Deb Walsh

In response to suggestions from our readers, we offer background for the stories included in this volume. Also included are updates on previous episode lists, and additions to the genres covered by **The Manifest**. What makes a **Manifest** program? A slant toward the paranormal. The Orb storyline in *Brisco County*, the dreamplane-dwelling Terrians in *Earth 2*, the deceased father of Benton Fraser on *Due South*, and the psychic characters in *seaQuest DSV* are all terrific **Manifest**-fodder. As are the ghostly brother in *Vanishing Son*, the soul-switching of *Quantum Leap*, the magic of *Robin of Sherwood*, and even some of the stranger experiences of *MacGyver*.

Some of the material here is reprinted from **The Manifest** #1, #2 and #3. Some information is taken from flyers, the Internet and updates from folks. Please note that addresses and information on fanzines, clubs and Internet sites and mailing lists listed here were current (or reasonably so) at the time of publication and are not guaranteed to be correct and current even a few months later. Always include a SASE to the editor or fan club president for current information before sending money.



Brisco County, Jr.	Bruce Campbell
James "Lord Bowler" Lonefeather ..	Julius Carry
Socrates Poole	Christian Clemenson
Dixie Cousins	Kelly Rutherford
Comet	Himself

Premise:

Harvard-educated lawyer Brisco County, Jr. returned to the west to track down the killer of his

father, Sheriff Brisco County, Sr. As a bounty hunter, he linked up with Lord Bowler, and together they sought out the mysterious and brutal John Bly, a man from the future who coveted the bizarre Orb, an artifact of strange power and danger. Along the way, Brisco also had some amazing adventures with more commonplace criminals and denizens of the Old West.

Episode list (in order by airdate):

Pilot
 The Orb Scholar
 No Man's Land
 Brisco In Jalisco
 Socrates' Sister
 Riverboat
 Pirates
 Senior Spirit
 Brisco for the Defense
 Showdown
 Deep in the Heart of Dixie
 Crystal Hawks
 Steel Horses
 Mail Order Brides
 AKA Kansas
 Bounty Hunter's Convention
 Fountain of Youth
 Hard Rock
 The Brooklyn Dodgers
 Bye Bly
 Ned Zed
 Stagecoach
 Wild Card
 And Baby Makes 3
 Bad Luck Betty
 High Treason Part 1
 High Treason Part 2

Factoids: Brisco County

Brisco fans on the Internet can discuss the series in the board **alt.tv.brisco-county**. Fans of Brisco star Bruce Campbell can sign up for **alt.fan.Bruce.Campbell**. In addition, there is a BruceNet web page available at:

<http://b62528.student.cwru.edu/bruce.html>.

The Vendredi Press fanzine, **The Coming Thing**, is still looking for submissions, for publication sometime in 1997.



The Bridge, Facing the Wall, The Burning Judge, Late for Dinner, Where There's Smoke

At an unnamed North American university in an unnamed North American city, Professor Laura Wingate chairs the Department of Parapsychology, assisted by her associate Professor John "J.J." Stillman, and their teaching assistant, Celia. At the university, they maintain an exhaustive data base of paranormal reports, legends, anecdotes, and documented incidents, in addition to conducting field investigations. Their casework runs the gamut of the paranormal – hauntings, poltergeist, past-life experiences, astral projection, curses, alien lifeforms, and more.

Note: *Beyond Reality*, after running on the Sci-Fi Channel, is now available in syndication.

In "The Bridge," a young boy was haunted by the spirit of his dead father. Obsessed with rejoining his father, the boy attempted suicide on the bridge where his father died, but J.J. and Laura see him and prevent him from jumping. The boy ran away before they could any more. Later, Laura admitted hearing a second voice, and for a moment, seeing another person on the bridge with the boy. J.J. saw nothing but the boy.

Their investigation turned up the fact that a man was killed on the bridge a few months earlier, before the bridge was shut down. They discovered that he left behind a wife and a young son, and they visited the mother. J.J. tracked the boy down, and sat talking with him, learning more about his isolation from his mother, and his conversations with his dead father. The boy had his father's gun with him, and when a policeman came along to move them on, the cop overreacted to the sight of the gun and shot the boy. In the hospital, waiting for the boy to come out of his coma, Laura forced the mother to admit that she had seen her husband's ghost, too.

Laura convinced her to return with her to the bridge, where the wife finally spoke with her husband. He's remained there because of the discord in his family – his wife unable to talk to her son because of her pain, his son desperate for a parent to love him. The boy died at the hospital, and appeared next to his father. Together, his parents convinced him to live, and

the boy disappeared, rejoining his body in the hospital.

In "Facing the Wall," J.J. was visited by Alec Shore, a garment inspected who suffered from recurring dreams. In those dreams, he was a faceless worker, number 1125 (his inspector number) in an equally bland, faceless world governed by a regimented, dictatorial military. J.J. was racing off to an appointment, and attempted to put Shore off, but as the man was leaving, he dropped into the dream state, and suffered a stroke. Months later, after Shore had unsuccessfully undergone rehabilitation, J.J. attempted to reach into Shore's dreams to bring him back. Employing biofeedback to match Shore's brainwave patterns, J.J. found himself under threat in Shore's world, a world Shore was unwilling to leave out of fear. When J.J. was tortured within the dream world, he suffered physical trauma in the "real" world, and Laura and Celia were desperate to disconnect him, but he'd become too deeply wound into the dream world. By convincing Shore to face up to his fears and make the effort to leave the dream world, J.J. was able to free both himself and Shore.

In "The Burning Judge," a fortune teller friend of Celia and Laura's was stalked by a man vowing to purge her evil from her by fire. The man invaded her dreams, burning her at the stake, and she awoke to find her apartment on fire. J.J. and Laura tracked down the distinctive mark the man wore, and found a reference to a judge from the 1600s, Jebediah Smith, the "Burning Judge." J.J. used dream regression with the woman to discover that she had been burned at the stake for witchcraft by Smith.

While Laura and the woman were talking in Laura's office, Smith broke, destroying the doorknob with heat from his hands. He kidnapped them and dragged them off to a park, where he prepared to burn them both at the stake. J.J. and Celia discovered them gone, and referring to the historical record on Smith, guess that he had taken them to the place of 1600s burnings.

Laura and the woman urged Smith to forgive himself – he had burned her at the stake originally not because of witchcraft, but because he wanted her. He couldn't forgive himself, and was engulfed in flames of his own making. J.J. arrived shortly afterward to release Laura and her friend.

In "Late for Dinner," a dysfunctional family was plagued by what appeared to be poltergeist activity. The family patriarch demanded that Dean Fleming send someone over to deal with the increasing annoyances, and J.J. and Laura were pressed into service. The wife of the family refused to accept that anything abnormal was happening, while her husband and father-in-law found the incidents mostly amusing, since they were directed at the wife. The young son of the family was the only one who could actually see the ghost. Laura befriended the boy, and learned that the ghost was actually the original patriarch of the family, whose phony portrait took pride of place in the house. While the portrait was that of a tall, handsome man, the ghost was actually a misshapen dwarf.

When the ghost stepped up his reign of terror against the family, urging the boy to retaliate against his family with violence, the boy finally turned his back on the ghost. The father, realizing the importance of the portrait, the only artifact saved from the ancient family castle in Scotland, decided to end the ghost's connection to this world by smashing the portrait over the head of the ghost. The ghost disappeared, and the family resolved to stop bickering amongst themselves, at least at the dinner table.

In "Where There's Smoke," Laura and J.J. hire the services of a father and son to take them to a forest reputed to be cursed in connection with a gold treasure. Laura's old archaeology teacher, Professor Baker, had been on an expedition in the forest, and disappeared several months earlier.

The father, Quinn, refused to enter the forest, and Laura and J.J. went in alone. An apparition looking like the son, Michael, led the father into the woods with the lure of gold, while Laura and J.J. find the decomposed corpse of one of Baker's grad students. J.J. went back to reach the police, who were at least 12 hours away.

While Quinn was in the woods following what he believed to be his son, Michael noticed his father coming out of the woods, and he was ordered to disable the truck, since Laura and J.J. would, according to him, kill them both. The real father came out of the woods to find his son crippling the truck, and the pair got into a fight, during which a flare gun went off, killing the boy.

J.J. appeared to Laura and argued with her, telling her that Quinn believed her responsible for Michael's death and that she should kill him. A similar occurrence happened to J.J. when he arrived back at the truck and found Michael dead; Laura urged him to kill Quinn. Quinn encountered Laura in the forest, and she told him J.J. was responsible for Michael's death by giving him gold fever.

J.J. saw Laura at a distance, crying out to Quinn, who apparently shot her. She died, and then disappeared into a mysterious smoke. J.J. finally faced Quinn in Baker's old camp, and the two men drew guns, J.J. the flare gun, Quinn a real gun. Laura found them both and told them that the demon of the forest, a smoke creature, was causing them to mistrust each other. The son suddenly crawled into the camp, telling the father that Laura and J.J. caused his death. J.J. and Quinn struggled until Laura broke up the fight, and the boy dissolved into smoke. They followed the smoke to its lair, where it continued to call out in Michael's voice, begging for help. Realizing that the demon caused him to kill his son, Quinn dropped explosives from the truck into the rocks where the smoke demon lived. He commanded Laura and J.J. to leave quickly, and fired a flare gun to ignite the explosives. Laura and J.J. arrived back at the truck and escaped.

The Champions

In the mid-1960s, a trio of agents (American Craig Stirling, and British agents Richard Barrett and Sharron Macready) from the secret organization, Nemesis, were assigned to retrieve a deadly virus-infected insects from a research laboratory deep in Communist China. When their plane was shot down by security forces, they died from their wounds and exposure to the brutal cold of the Himalayas. A mysterious civilization, unknown to the outside world, extended their help to the threesome, bringing them into their secret city and performing extensive surgery on them. Stirling, Barrett and Macready were then placed back in the wreckage of their plane, their wounds healed, and their senses and physical powers heightened far beyond the norm. When Barrett insisted on going back to find their mysterious benefactors, he separated from Stirling and Macready, and later discovered the leader of the mysterious people. He was told that their powers are a gift, but the price of the gift is silence — no one may ever know of the hidden

civilization buried deep in the Himalayas. Barrett eventually rejoined Stirling and Macready and related the story — proving it to them by performing amazing feats of prowess. The trio returned to Nemesis and continued to use their abilities in their fight against crime and evil in the world, and never revealed the secret of the ancient city.



Factoids: Due South

Partial Recall is a *Due South* novella available from Elyse Dickenson. SASE to Elyse Dickenson, 43 Topfield Road, Wilton, CT 06897. Elyse also maintains a list of *Due South* fanzines and Internet activity; SASE for the list.

Compass Points is currently accepting submissions. SASE to Mary Wardell, 2104 SE 28th Street, Portland, OR 97214 or E-Mail PnMaryF@aol.com.

The Last of a Breed is a planned *Due South* zine from Neon RainBow Press and Queen's Press. Submissions to Neon RainBow Press, 1705 14th St. #412, Boulder, CO 80302, Attn: Cinda Gillilan and Jody Norman, or Queen's Press, 4003 Old Hearn Road, Bryan, TX 77803, Attn: H. Ann Walton.

Dog Tales at High Noon is also planned from Queen's Press along with Twisted Macha Press. Submissions to Twisted Macha Press, 1705 14th St. #412, Boulder, CO 80302, Attn: Brigid Morgan, or Queen's Press, 4003 Old Hearn Road, Bryan, TX 77803, Attn: H. Ann Walton.

Inuit Tales is a planned *Due South* zine from Vendredi Press. SASE to the editorial address for information; planned for 1996/1997.

The *Due South* discussion list is available by subscription. Send E-Mail to:

LISTSERV@VM.EGE.EDU.TR (or
LISTSERV@TREARN.BITNET)

subscribe dsouth-l <your name>

The *Due South* fiction list is now available by subscription. Send E-Mail to:

listproc@ripken.oit.unc.edu

SUBSCRIBE DSFICT <your name>

Previously posted fiction is retrievable from the listserver, as well as through ftp from:

ftp://khijol.intele.net/pub/dsouth/stories

An excellent *Due South* WWW site is:

http://www.interlog.com/~macgowan

Other sites include:

http://duke.asask.ca/~turner/dusouth.html
http://metro.turnpike.net/t/tangh/dsouth/dsouth.html
http://www.webcom.com/~esilver/duesouth.html



Devon Adair	Debrah Farentino
John Danziger	Clancy Brown
True Danziger	J. Madison Wright
Yale	Sullivan Walker
Ulysses (Uly) Adair	Joey Zimmerman
Morgan Martin	John Gegenhuber
Bess Martin	Rebecca Gayheart
Dr. Julia Heller	Jessica Steen
Alonzo Solace	Antonio Sabato Jr.

Premise:

In the year 2192, the Earth was nearly uninhabitable, and mankind lived almost exclusively in manmade space stations. Breathing recycled air in artificial environments, humans

were slowly dying, producing a generation of children afflicted with the Syndrome, a degenerative disease that was fatal by age 8. Devon Adair, a designer of the space stations and a powerful woman in her own right, was the mother of a Syndrome child, Ulysses Adair (Uly). She set her sights on taking her child to a new planet, a second Earth, to save him and the other Syndrome children. When sabotage forced the advance ship to crashland on planet G889, thousands of miles from their intended landing site, the occupants found themselves in a strangely hostile environment, populated by previously unknown intelligent life. Among those lifeforms were the Terrians, who communicated through the Dream Plane, and who altered young Uly Adair to remove the Syndrome and make him something other than human. The aliens had landed on G889, and the aliens were human.

Episode list (in order of airdate):

First Contact (2 Hour Movie)
 The Man Who Fell to Earth (Two)
 Life Lessons
 Promises, Promises
 Natural Born Grendlers
 A Memory Play
 Water
 The Church of Morgan
 The Enemy Within
 Redemption
 Moon Cross
 Better Living Through Morganite Part I
 Better Living Through Morganite Part II
 Grendlers in the Myst
 The Greatest Love Story Never Told
 Brave New Pacifica
 After the Thaw
 The Boy Who Would be Terrian King
 Survival of the Fittest
 Flower Child
 All About Eve

Note: Fan efforts are underway to get *Earth 2* renewed. Letter campaigns to NBC and the other big networks are being organized by fans around the country.

Factoids: Earth 2

Discussion and fiction lists for *Earth 2* can be subscribed to via the Internet. To subscribe, send E-Mail to:

MAJORDOMO@stargame.org

In the body of the mail, write:

subscribe earth2

for the discussion list, or

subscribe e2-fanfic

for the fiction list.

An additional *Earth 2* discussion list is available by subscription. Send E-Mail to:

earth2-request@netsplit.phoenix.net

Write SUBSCRIBE in the subject and body of the mail.

The first *Earth 2* convention, New Pacificon, is scheduled for April 19-21, 1996 in Albuquerque, NM. For details, send E-Mail to NewPacificon@stargame.org.

Eden Advance is an *Earth 2* fan club, which has already published the first issue of its newsletter, *Dream Plane*. For more information, SASE to Eden Advance, P.O. Box 733, Westminster, CA 92684-0733.

Earth2 Foundations is a new *Earth 2* fan club. For information, send a SASE to Earth2 Foundations, c/o Lawrence Perry, 9 Edgewood Ave., Cranston, RI 02905. For a copy of the online newsletter, send E-Mail to UlyAdair@aol.com or DrHeller@aol.com.

In the Heart of Eden is an adult *Earth 2* novel. A general anthology *Earth 2* zine is also underway. For more information, E-Mail to Stara@primenet.com.

The Internet discussion board for *Earth 2* can be found at **alt.tv.earth2**.

Posted fan fiction based on *Earth 2* can be downloaded from the World Wide Web site at:

<http://www.best.com/~ftmexpat/e2/e2.html>

First Light is a fanzine seeking *Earth 2* fiction and artwork. For guidelines and information, send a SASE to E. Catherine Tobler, 8782-E Allison Drive, Westminster, CO 80005-1680.

Eden Project is an all-*Earth 2* fanzine scheduled for winter 1995. For more info, E-Mail to AnnieBW@aol.com anniebaw@umsa7.umd.edu, or send a SASE to Ann White, 15611 Dorset Road #103, Laurel, MD 20707.

Dreamplane is the tentative title for an all-*Earth 2* fanzine in the works from Vendredi Press. This will probably be a one-shot, containing fiction and art by Deb Walsh.

FRIDAY THE 13TH

Antique-seller Louis Vendredi sold his soul to the Devil and, to serve his master, cursed the antiques in his store. But Vendredi's conscience gets the better of him, and when a child wanted a cursed doll, he tried to renege on his deal with the Devil. The Devil took him, cursing his soul for all eternity. The store, Vendredi's Antiques, was inherited by Vendredi's niece and nephew, Michelle (Micki) Foster and Ryan Dallion. Jack Marshak, an ex-magician and a supplier of objets d'art to Vendredi's store, returned to the store to find Vendredi dead and his objects cursed. In almost every case, the antiques bestow special gifts or powers on their possessors, but the price of the gifts is pain or death to some other person. Together, the trio set out to recover all the cursed antiques. Along the way, they discovered that the objects cannot be destroyed, only contained in a special vault built by Vendredi. When Ryan was killed and resurrected (as a child), his place in the triumvirate was taken over by Johnny Ventura, an old friend whose father was killed by someone using a cursed object.

Factoids: Friday the 13th – The Series

Note: *Friday the 13th – The Series* is currently running on the Sci-Fi Channel.

Curses, Foiled Again! is a *Friday the 13th – The Series* fanzine available from Susan Garrett (see *Forever Knight*).

A *Friday the 13th – The Series* Internet discussion list is available. To subscribe, send E-Mail to:

f13-request@kurgan.com

In the body of the mail, write:

subscribe f13 <your name – two words minimum>

A World Wide Web site is available at:

<http://www.eden.com/~kurgan/f13.html>



There are no specific references to episodes of the series cited in the story in this issue.

800-year old vampire Nick Knight was searching for a way to regain his humanity. A Crusader in Frederick II's capture of Jerusalem, Nicholas the Knight was seduced by beautiful vampire Janette, and brought over by her vampire master LaCroix in the year 1228. For many centuries, he travelled the world with his mentor LaCroix and Janette. At times, they parted company only to reunite later, until finally Nick decided to pursue his lost humanity. LaCroix, both friend and master to Nick, refused to allow Nick to cross back over, and consistently foiled Nick's attempts to find a cure for his vampirism. Only LaCroix's apparent death freed Nick from this interference.

Among Nick's various personas through the centuries had been a field doctor in the Union Army during the Civil War, an Associate Professor of Archaeology at the University of Chicago, and a rock performer at Woodstock. Suffering from the "Dorian Gray syndrome," Nick had to leave each of his lives behind him as the world grew older around him. After being brought to Natalie Lambert as a corpse following an attempt to save humans from a bomb, Nick's vampiric nature healed him, actually pulling his lost blood back into his body. Natalie convinced him that she had hopes of curing him, and he became homicide detective with the Toronto Metro Police, working the night shift with his partner Don Schanke. Medical Examiner Doctor Natalie Lambert was the only human who knows his secret, and was helping him to cross back over. Janette continued to live in Toronto, proprietress of the exclusive nightclub, The Raven, which also serves as home to a number of vampires.

In the second season of *Forever Knight*, Knight and Schanke moved to a new precinct, leaving behind Captain Joseph Stonetree and coming under the command of Captain Amanda Cohen. Nick's master, LaCroix, returned from the dead at the end

of the first season, and revealed himself to Nick early in the second season.

Detective Nick Knight . . . Geraint Wyn Davies
 Doctor Natalie Lambert Catherine Disher
 Detective Don Schanke John Kapelos
 Janette Deborah Duchêne
 LaCroix Nigel Bennett
 Captain Amanda Cohen Natsuka Ohama

Second Season Episodes (in order by airdate):

Killer Instinct
 A Fate Worse Than Death
 Stranger Than Fiction
 Forward into the Past
 Hunted
 Faithful Followers
 Father's Day
 Undue Process
 Bad Blood
 Can't Run, Can't Hide
 Capital Offense
 Amateur Night
 Beyond the Law
 The Fix
 Be My Valentine
 The Fire Inside
 Blood Money
 Partners of the Month
 The Queen of Harps
 A More Permanent Hell
 The Code
 Curiouser and Curiouser
 Near Death
 Baby, Baby
 Close Call
 Crazy Love

Forever Knight just began its third season, on the USA cable network and in syndication. The characters of Don Schanke and Captain Amanda Cohen were killed in the season opener, and new characters Detective Tracy Vetter (Lisa Ryder), vampire Javier Vachon (Ben Bass) and Captain Joe Reese (Blu Mankuma) were introduced.

Factoids: *Forever Knight*

Internet discussion boards for *Forever Knight* include:

alt.tv.forever-knight
alt.tv.forever-knight.spoilers

World Wide Web pages include:

<http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~gjwalli/fktoc.html>
<http://www.spe.sony.com/Pictures/tv/forever/forever.html>
<http://www.catt.ncsu.edu/users/vamp/WWW/fk.html>

To subscribe to either the *Forever Knight* discussion, fiction or spoiler lists, direct E-Mail to LISTSERV@PSUVM.PSU.EDU. Mail should read:

Discussion list:

SUBSCRIBE FORKNI-L <your name - two words minimum>

Fiction list:

SUBSCRIBE FKFIC-L <your name - two words minimum>

Spoiler list:

SUBSCRIBE FKSPOILR <your name - two words minimum>

The Raven, a letterzine devoted to *Forever Knight*: \$6 every 6 months (subject to change as **The Raven** expands) - tentative publication schedule every 6 weeks. Write to Amy Hull and Paula Sanders, 603 W. Walnut, Carbondale, IL 62901. E-Mail address: GR4932@SIUCVMB.SIU.EDU (Internet).

Good Guys Wear Fangs II features some *Forever Knight* fiction, as well as Nick Knight and other vampire genre fiction and poetry. A future issue is planned. Contact Mary Ann B. McKinnon, 254 Blunk Avenue, Plymouth, MI 48170. Mary Ann also does the **Good Guy Vampire Letterzine**. Include a SASE for information on either publication.

Samskar is a *Forever Knight* novella written by gh coyote and published by Fenris House, Special Services Unlimited, P.O. Box 684, Hewitt, NJ 07421. SASE for information.

Barbara Fister-Liltz publishes an all-*Forever Knight* fanzine called **Knightbeat**. For more information, send a SASE to Barbara at 8601A W. Cermak Road, N. Riverside, IL 60546.

On the Wings of the Knight is a *Forever/Nick Knight* fanzine edited by Ann Hupe. SASE to Peg Kennedy and Bill Hupe at Footrot Flats, 916 Lamb Road, Mason, MI 48854-9445.

Knight Times is an adult *Forever Knight* fanzine. For more information, send a SASE to Star Urioste, 27436 Palmwood Avenue, Hayward, CA 94545.

The Manifest #1, #2 and #3 also contain *Forever Knight* fiction, and more is sought for future issues. For information, send a legal-sized SASE to the editorial address.

Just My Type features a *Forever Knight/Quantum Leap* crossover, as well as *Nick Knight* and *Lost Boys* fiction. Some of this fiction is adult in nature. SASE to Mystery Frank (see *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues*). A second issue may be planned; SASE for information. E-Mail address (GEnie): M.FRANK7 (or M.FRANK7@genie.com via Internet).

Issue #2 of **Temporal Times** features a *Nick Knight/Quantum Leap* story (illustrated by your editor). For more information, SASE to Mary Bloemker (see *Shadow Chasers*).

Knight In My Veins is a planned *Forever Knight* zine from Snark Press (Liz Vogel, editor), 2001 Northampton Way, Lansing, MA 48912-3527. SASE for information.

The Official Geraint Wyn Davies Fan Club membership includes 2-4 newsletters a year, an autographed photo (genuinely autographed, not done by some secretary somewhere), and a few other goodies. SASE to Rose Mary Shad, 4133 Glendale Road, Woodbridge, VA 22193 for current information.

For information on **The Forever Knight Fan Club**, send a SASE to the club at P.O. Box 1228, Boston, MA 02130-0011.

Dreaming of the Knight is 80 US legal size pages (8.5"x14"), with wrap-around cover by Ann Larimer, available from Susan M. Garrett, 14B Terrace Court, Toms River, NJ 08753. Also available are: **A Little Night Music** (sequel to **Dreaming**) by Jude Wilson, 100 pages; **False Heart** by Susan, 120 pages; **Kind Soul** by Susan, 194 pages; **Daydreams and Nightmares** (anthology), 84 pages; and **Lizards in the Grass** by Karen Miller. And there's probably more, since Susan is very prolific. SASE for information.

Forever features *Highlander*, *Forever Knight* and *FK/HL* crossover fiction. Approximately 150

pages. SASE to Tara O'Shea (see address under *X-Files* zines) for information.

Forever Net is a fanzine which selects from among the best posted fiction from the FK/FIC-L list. SASE to Valery King, P.O. Box 1407, Albany, OR 97321-0548 for information.

The Heart Has Its Reasons is a *Forever Knight* novella by Jamie Melody Randell, available from Nanci Casad, P.O. Box 49, Savoy, IL 61874-0049.

For information on **The First Forever Knight Fan Club of Canada**, send a self-addressed envelope with 2 IRCs from the US, or a SASE from within Canada to the club c/o Tracy Essam, 302 Roselawn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M4R 1G1, CANADA.

Les Enfants de LaCroix, 1680 44th Street, SouthEast, Number 88091, Grand Rapids, MI 49518-0091 for information (include a SASE).

The Nigel Bennett Fan Club, c/o Star Urioste, 25055 Copa Del Ora, #104, Hayward, CA 94545 (include a SASE), or E-Mail to S.URIOSTE@Genie.com for information. Nigel Bennett plays LaCroix on *Forever Knight*.

The John Kapelos Fan Club, c/o Cal Lynn, P.O. Box 11617, Alexandria, VA 22312 (include a SASE), Fax: 703-671-8786, or E-Mail to JKFCPrez@aol.com. John Kapelos played Schanke on the first two seasons of *Forever Knight*.

The Deborah Duchene Fan Club, c/o Peggie Religa, 960 Junesong Way, San Jose, CA 95133-1120, or E-Mail to jreliga@aol.com. Deborah Duchene played Janette on the first two seasons of *Forever Knight*.

Production Addresses:

James Parriott
Executive Producer, *Forever Knight*
Culver Studio, Building C, Room 209
9336 West Washington Boulevard
Culver City, CA 90232
USA

Paragon Entertainment
119 Spadina Avenue
Suite 900
Toronto, ONT M5V 2L1
CANADA

HIGHLANDER

Duncan MacLeod Adrian Paul
 Richie Ryan Stan Kirsch
 Joe Dawson Jim Byrnes
 Anne Lisa Howard

Third Season Episodes (in order by airdate):

The Samurai
 Line of Fire
 The Revolutionary
 The Cross of St. Antoine
 Rite of Passage
 Courage
 The Lamb
 Obsession
 Shadows
 Blackmail
 The Samurai
 Line of Fire
 Vendetta
 They Also Serve
 Blind Faith
 Song of the Executioner
 Star-Crossed
 Methos
 Take Back The Night
 Testimony
 Mortal Sins
 Reasonable Doubt
 Finale Part 1
 Finale Part 2

Factoids: Highlander

Note: *Highlander* continues to produce new episodes in syndication. The early episodes are now being shown Monday through Friday on the USA Network.

A *Highlander* Internet discussion board is available at:

alt.tv.highlander

A *Highlander* FAQ is available in various forms:

<ftp://mithral.iit.edu/pub/highlander/FAQ>

<gopher://wiretap.spies.com/00/Library/Media/Tv/highlander.epi>

http://mithral.iit.edu:8080/highlander/FAQ/highlander_3.html

Gathering Web site:

<http://thunder.indstate.edu/h7/cswank/.high.html>

Official *Highlander* Web site (including archived fiction from the HLFIC fiction list):

<http://mithral.iit.edu:8080/highlander>

A *Highlander* discussion list is available by subscription. E-Mail to:

HIGHLA-L@psuvm.psu.edu

The Gathering – The Official *Highlander* Films and Series Fan Club, P.O. Box 123, Aurora, CO 80040-0123. For membership information send a SASE or send E-Mail to ai204@freenet.HSC.Colorado.edu

Rules of the Game is available from Catherine Schlein, 6755 Union Pl. Arvada CO 80004 **Rules of the Game** is an Of Dreams and Schemes Press publication.

Highlander Buzz is an open discussion *Highlander* letterzine. Send a SASE c/o Valerie Meachum, 1914 Deborah Court, Columbus, OH 43229 for information.

Thistle and Sabre is a *Highlander* fanzine looking for material. SASE to Robin Schindler, 15982 Atitlan Drive, Hacienda Heights, CA 91745 or Christine Reynolds, 1539 Lodge Street, Alcoa, TN 37701.

Immortal Tales! is a fanzine based upon *Highlander* seeking submissions. SASE to Mary Anne McKinnon, 245 Blunk Avenue, Plymouth, MI 48170.

Who Wants to Live Forever? is a *Highlander* fanzine from Mystery Frank (see *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues* fanzine listings for address).

Of The Clan MacLeod is a new *Highlander* (movies and TV series) fanzine accepting submissions. E-Mail to Berwick@aug.com or SASE to Kimberwicke, P.O. Box 1114, St. Augustine, FL 32085-1114.

The Clan, The Official UK Highlander Appreciation Society, Joe O'Callaghan, 2 Caswell Close, Stocking Farm Estate, Leicestershire, LE4 2GH England.

Claymore, A Highlander Fan Club c/o Elaine Nichol, 107 Cairnswell Avenue, Halfway, Cambuslang Glasgow, G72 8SP Scotland

PEACE — The Adrian Paul Fan Club, 12439 Magnolia Blvd. #159, North Hollywood CA 91607. Send a SASE to President Rebecca Flynn for info; E-Mail to peaceapfc@aol.com.

The Prize, the newsletter of the Watchers of CI\$, is now available monthly on the Compuserve Information Service. We cover the results of discussion in our thriving on-line *Highlander* fan-club / three-ring-circus. Information, hardcopy back issues (\$2.00 US) and non-fiction submissions: Samantha Lynn, 73524,43@compuserve.com or SASE to Samantha Lynn at C/O Judy Kunz, Kibby Labs, 25235 Dequindre, Madison Heights, MI 48071. Issue #1 relates the film to the series; Issue #2 contains an ambitious series timeline! The Watchers of CI\$ exist on the Compuserve Information Service. For info on Compuserve and the SF Forum (where the SF TV section containing *Highlander* is), call 1-800-848-8990 and ask for representative 186.

Production Addresses:

SSA Public Relations
15060 Venture Blvd.
Suite 360
Burbank, CA 91505

RYSHER TPE
3400 Riverside Drive
Suite 600
Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

INDIANA JONES

Indiana Jones was first introduced in the films *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Temple of Doom*, and *The Last Crusade*. In those films, he was established as an accomplished adventurer, an

archaeology professor at Barnett College, and an epic hero. See "Call for Papers" for a list of films and episodes.

Factoids — Indiana Jones

Note: The Family Channel has been airing the last four *Young Indiana Jones* movies. One more film remains to be shown, probably sometime in 1995/1996.

The *Indiana Jones* fan novel, **Burnt Offerings**, and several issues of the *Indiana Jones* fanzine **Fortune and Glory** are available from Mary Jean Holmes, 10534 W. Cortez Circle #7, Franklin, WI 53132. SASE for information.

See also **Keeping Up With The Joneses**, an *Indiana Jones* newsletter and letterzine published by Jeanne Webster, 416 East 241st Street, Woodlawn, NY 10470. SASE for information.

Another *Indiana Jones* fanzine worth checking out is **Field Studies**, published by Cheree Cargill, 457 Meadowhill Drive, Garland, TX 75043. SASE for information.

Kolchak: The Night Stalker

Veteran newspaper reporter Carl Kolchak found himself face to face with a modern-day vampire while tracking down a story in Las Vegas, Nevada. With this unlikely event, he entered a world of the supernatural contained in the mundane, coming into conflict with an age-old alchemist, succubi, mummies, zombies and all manner of arcane characters.

**KUNG
FU** *The Legend
Continues*

Kwai Chang Caine David Carradine
Peter Caine Chris Potter
Young Peter Nathaniel Moreau
Carolyn Blaisdell McCall Kim Nelles
The Ancient (Lo Si) Kim Chan
Master Khan (from Temple) Rob Moses

Cheryl Hines (Caine's ward) Callista Carradine
 Dr. Nicholas J. Elder (Nickie) . David Hewlett
 Detective Mary Margaret Skalany Victoria Snow
 Detective Jody Powell Belinda Metz
 Detective Kermit Griffin Scott Wentworth
 Detective Kelly Blaine Nicole Oliver
 Detective Roger Chin Oscar Hsu
 Chief of Detectives Frank Strenlich
 William Dunlop
 Detective Janet Morgan Janet Snetsinger
 Detective Blake Robert Michelson
 Desk Sergeant John Broderick . John Bourgeois
 Captain Karen Simms Kate Trotter
 Donny Double D Michael Rhoades
 Lula (Donny's girlfriend) . Starvoola Logotethis
 Jack Wong (criminal) Von Flores
 Bon Bon Hai (villain) Soon-Teck Oh

Third Season Episodes (in order by airdate):

Rite of Passage
 Plague
 May I Walk With You
 Return of Sing-Ling
 Manhunt
 Gunfighters
 The Chinatown Murder Mystery: The Case of the
 Poisoned Hand
 Target
 Citizen Caine
 Quake!
 Goodbye Mr. Caine
 The Sacred Chalice of I-Ching
 Eye Witness
 Demons
 Deadly Fashion
 Cruise Missiles
 The Promise
 Flying Fists of Fury II
 Banker's Hours
 Kung Fu Blues
 Brotherhood of the Bell
 Destiny

Factoids: Kung Fu: The Legend Continues

The Official Kung Fu: The Legend Continues Fan Club: Annual membership is \$12.00 (USA), \$15.00 (CN), \$18 (Int'l). Check or money order in US FUNDS ONLY and payable to Valerie J. Bristol, 2334 Cypress Bend Drive S. #912, Pompano Beach, FL 33069, USA.

The Official Chris Potter Fan Club: Annual membership U.S., \$20.00(US). Please make check

or money order payable to "Chris Potter Official Fan Club." Please include a SASE (or SAE & IRC if outside Canada) with *all* correspondence. Mail to: Chris Potter Official Fan Club, P.O. Box 876, Station F, 50 Charles St., E. Toronto, Ontario Canada, M4Y 2N9.

David Carradine Fan Club: 49-6A The Donway W., Box 922, Don Mills, Ontario, CANADA, M3C 2E8. SAE with 2 IRCs for information.

Fans of David Carradine: c/o Maria Porak, P.O. Box 689, Prospect East, South Australia 5082. SAE with 2 IRCs for information.

Fans of David Carradine: c/o Jessika Meyer-Gruhl, AM Gexberg 11, 31028 Gronau (Leine), Germany. SAE with 2 IRCs for information.

The Scott Wentworth Fan Club is now forming. For more information, send a SASE to P.O. Box 8083, Bloomington, IN 47407-8083.

Sound of the Flute: Available from Deb Walsh, 46 John Street #2, Malden, MA 02148. #2 is in the works; SASE for info, or E-Mail DEBWALSH@aol.com).

Patterns: submissions to Jeanne McClure, 986 Hopewell Road, Morgantown, NC 28655-8241 or Carol Frisbie, 518 South Abingdon Street, Arlington, VA 22204-1339. Order from Bill Hupe, Footrot Flats, 916 Lamb Road, Mason, MI 48854-9445. #4 is in the works. SASE for information.

Eight Pieces of Brocade is a *KF:TLC* novel by Jeanne McClure, available from Carol Frisbie, 518 South Abingdon Street, Arlington, VA 22204-1339. SASE for information.

Splinters of Light: Cathy Schlein, 6755 Union Place, Arvada, CO 80004. #4 is in the works. SASE for information.

Harmonies: *KF:TLC* letterzine, Suzan Haigler, 940 Abercorn Extension, #132, Savannah, GA 31406. SASE for information.

Corridors: Kari Masoner, 515 E. 11th Avenue, #8, Denver, Co 80203. SASE for price information.

Chinese Take Away is a *KF:TLC* humor zine from Jennifer Adams Kelley, 748 Dodge Ave., Evanston,

IL 60202. #3 is in the works. SASE for information.

The Persian Flaw: (novel) from Mary Lowe, P.O. Box 980220, Houston, TX 77098-0220. **The Persian Flaw #2** is in progress, SASE for information.

Bloody Marvelous! is available from Carolyn Cooper, Whine Press, P.O. Box 66244, Houston, TX 77266. Submissions accepted for **Bloody Marvelous! #2**, slated for Fall 1995.

That Was Zen, This Is Tao #1: Available from Mysti Frank, 4103 8th Street, Baltimore, MD 21225. SASE for information.

Child of the Moving Tide by Jeanne DeVore and Signe Hovde, and published by Kate Nuernberg is a cycle of stories encompassing six years in the life of young Peter Caine, from the orphanage through his high school years with the Blaisdell family. Available from Jeanne DeVore, 1136 S. Oak Park Ave., 2nd Floor, Oak Park, IL 60304. SASE for information.

Purification and its sequel, **The Third Eye** (both novelettes by Monica Szybel), are available in a companion volume entitled **Unification** from Monica Szybel, PO Box 2416, Livingston, NJ 07039. **The Third Eye** is also available separately. SASE for information.

Speak No Evil is a novel from Laureen Peltier, with cover art by Anne-Marie Smith and Roxanne M. Peltier. Available from Laureen Peltier, 1891 E. Montana Ave., St. Paul, MN 55119. A second novel, **Thursday's Child**, is scheduled for spring 1996; SASE for information.

Chinese Charm is a *KF:TLC* story in script form from Victoria Char, P.O. Box 896, Painesville, OH 44077. SASE for information.

Original Nature is a new *KF:TLC* zine from Dixon Trees, Suite 1010, 4001 Bayview Ave., Willowdale, Ontario, Canada M2M 3Z7. The first issue is in print, with more to follow; SASE within Canada, SAE and 2 IRCs outside of Canada for information.

Kicking Back is looking for submissions. SASE to Cynthia Liljeblad, 1024 E. Cabrillo Park Dr., Santa Ana, CA 92701 or Jeanne R. Gold, 44 Hiawatha Road, Hi-Nella, NJ 08083.

Shades of Green is also looking for submissions, centered around the 101st's favorite computer geek, Det. Kermit Griffin. SASE to Cynthia Liljeblad, 1024 E. Cabrillo Park Dr., Santa Ana, CA 92701 or Jeanne R. Gold, 44 Hiawatha Road, Hi-Nella, NJ 08083.

The Uncarved Block is accepting submissions through January 1996 for publication in spring 1996. SASE within Canada, SAE & IRC outside of Canada for information to Sharon Cozens, 3555 Don Mills Road, Suite 6, Box 161, Willowdale, Ontario, Canada M2H 3N3.

The Lacquered Box is also accepting submissions; SASE to Laura Peck, 302 Lincoln Avenue, Glen Burnie, MD 21061.

Caine: The Way of the Dragon: Seeking submissions based on the original *Kung Fu* series. For submission guidelines and deadline info, send SASE to Gee Publications, RR 1 Box 12, Davenport, NE 68335.

The Tiger and the Dragon: Now open for submissions. Criterion Press, c/o Kathy Agel, 9 - 11 Ayres Court, Bayonne, NJ 07002-3510 E-mail questions to Badkarma.1@genie.com or Badkarma1@aol.com.

KF:TLC In Cyberspace

GEnie (Aladdin users should periodically update their topics, since topics and categories can move on GEnie): **Showbiz** cat 10, topic 39; **SFRT2** cat 16, topic 14; **SFRT3** cat 19 topic 30.

America Online (AOL): TV Gossip (Syndicated A-M); Live chats held bi-weekly in People Connection, Rooms, Private Room, KUNG FU TO YOU TOO - E-Mail to either deb_walsh or swansonj for info.

Prodigy: Entertainment, Television, Bulletin Boards, **TV Board**

Internet: Both the *KF:TLC* discussion list and fiction lists are available for subscription via E-Mail. Both lists are available in digest form.

To subscribe to the discussion list, send E-Mail to:

LISTSERV@VM.TEMPLE.EDU
with the following in the body of the note
(no more, no less) ...

SUBSCRIBE KFTLC-L (your name-must be two words min.)

To subscribe to the fiction list, send E-Mail to:

LISTSERV@VM.TEMPLE.EDU

with the following in the body of the note (no more, no less) ...

SUBSCRIBE KFFIC (your name-must be two words min.)

Production Addresses

Address for fan mail: *KF:TLC*, in care of Warner Brothers Television Canada, 565 Orwell Street, Mississauga, Ontario, CANADA L5A 2W4.

Address for suggestions: *KF:TLC* c/o Warner Brothers TV, 4000 Warner Blvd., Burbank, CA 91505, ATTN: Gregg Maday.



Clark Kent/Superman	Dean Cain
Lois Lane	Teri Hatcher
Perry White	Lane Smith
Jimmy Olsen	Justin Whalen
Ma (Martha) Kent	K Kallan
Pa (Jonathan) Kent	Eddie Jones
Agent Dan Scardino	Jim Pirri
Maysen Drake	Farrah Forke
Franklin Stern	James Earl Jones

Changes in the second season included the replacement of Michael Landes with Justin Whalen as Jimmy Olsen; the disappearance of Cat Grant; the supposed death and eventual resurrection of Lex Luthor; the addition of new characters: James Earl Jones as Franklin Stern, the new owner of the *Daily Planet*, Farrah Forke as Assistant DA Maysen Drake, who until her untimely death was more interested in getting Clark alone than taking his deposition, and Jim Pirri as Dan Scardino, the DEA

agent hot in pursuit of Lois Lane's affections. The largest change in the series was the start of an actual romance between Lois and Clark, which resulted in Clark proposing to Lois in the second season finale.

Second Season Episodes (in order by airdate):

Madame Ex
Wall of Sound
The Source
The Prankster
Church of Metropolis
Operation Blackout
That Old Gang of Mine
A Bolt From the Blue
Seasons Greedings
Metallo
Chi Of Steel
The Eyes Have It
The Phoenix
Top Copy
Return of the Prankster
Lucky Leon
Resurrection
Tempus Fugitive
Target: Jimmy Olsen
Individual Responsibility
Whine, Whine, Whine
And the Answer Is ...

Factoids: Lois and Clark

An Internet discussion board for *Lois and Clark* is available at:

alt.tv.lois-n-clark

A *Lois and Clark* discussion list is available by subscription. E-Mail to:

listserv@vm.egge.edu.tr

**SUBSCRIBE LOISCLA <Firstname Lastname>
as the body of the message**

The Krypton Club newsletter is available by E-Mail. E-Mail to:

Krypton@clark.net

Lois & Clark, the Web Server is available at:

<http://www.webcom.com/~lnc/index.html>

Lois and Clark image files are retrievable by ftp from:

<ftp://ftp.best.com:/pub/hyperion/Lois-and-Clark>



MacGyver Richard Dean Anderson
Pete Thornton (as of Season 2) . . . Dana Elcar

Recurring guest roles by:

Jack Dalton Bruce McGill
Penny Parker Teri Hatcher
Murdoc Michael Des Barres
Harry Jackson John Anderson

MacGyver (no first name mentioned until last season) is a trouble-shooter who solves problems with his brains rather than a gun or his fists. During the first season he was employed by the DXS, and then by the Phoenix Foundation.

In "Serenity", MacGyver fell asleep on his couch after a long assignment and dreamed he was a Civil War veteran trying to settle in Montana. Many of his friends at the Phoenix Foundation and some of his enemies appeared as characters in his dream – all with their own names but with somewhat different personalities. After settling an issue about water rights with a nearby rancher, MacGyver is shot in the dream but the bullet hits a wooden handled pocketknife he carried in a breast pocket. When he awakens from the dream, the knife – with bullet – is on the floor beside the couch.

In "Trail of Tears," MacGyver is called on to testify for an electric power company about the environmental impact of a plant they planned to built on disputed land. Opposing him is a Native American lawyer who claims that the land is sacred ground. When the decision goes against the Native Americans, a spirit guide named

Standing Wolf appears to the lawyer and gives him a vision of the future. He sees that power lines are across the land, killing it, and turns terrorist, planning to blow up the construction. MacGyver, meanwhile, has decided to investigate further, but is shot by the plant's guards, who plan to blame his death on the lawyer. Mac gets away and hides in a cave. He dreams he meets Standing Wolf, who removes the bullet and gives him a pendant to help heal his wound. Standing Wolf shows him the same vision that was shown to the lawyer, but explains that the way of violence is what will lead to the depicted future. When Mac awakens, still wearing the pendant, he finds the removed bullet atop a chest containing a map showing the original reservation boundaries. The power plant is indeed on sacred land belonging to the tribe.

In the two part "Good Knight, MacGyver," MacGyver has had his family line researched and learns that an older branch of his family was named M'lver and an ancestor was wrongly accused of being a traitor against King Arthur. After leaving the genealogical office, he saves a young man from being hit by a falling planter, but is grazed by the falling object himself. He finds himself in King Arthur's time (Arthur strongly resembling the now blind Peter Thornton) and, after saving the king from a poisoning attempt by Morgana, is granted knighthood and sent on a quest to redeem his ancestor's name. Before he departs on the quest, Arthur gives him an amulet in friendship. MacGyver later turns the amulet into a dog whistle to save himself and Merlin from an attack dog. After MacGyver is shot by Morgana, he awakens with a bandaged head and finds the intact amulet in his pocket.

Episode list (in order of airdate):

Pilot
Golden Triangle
The Thief of Budapest
The Gauntlet
The Heist
Trumbo's World
Last Stand
Hellfire
Prodigal
Target MacGyver
Nightmares
Deathlock
Flame's End
Countdown
Enemy Within

Every Time She Smiles	Ma Dalton
To Be a Man	Cleo Rocks
Ugly Duckling	Fraternity of Thieves
Slow Death	Battle of Tommy Giordano
Escape	Challenge
A Prisoner of Conscience	Runners
Assassin	Gold Rush
Human Factor	Invisible Killer
Eraser	Brainwashed
Twice Stung	Easy Target
Wish Child	Renegade
Final Approach	Unfinished Business
Eagles	Legend of the Holy Rose (parts 1 and 2)
Jack of Lies	Black Corsage
Road Not Taken	Cease Fire
Silent World	Second Chance
Three for the Road	Halloween Knights
Phoenix Under Siege	Children of Light
Family Matter	Black Rhino
Soft Touch	Ten Percent Solution
Birth Day	Two Times Trouble
Pirates	Madonna
Out in the Cold	Serenity
Dalton, Jack of Spies	Live and Learn
Partners	Log Jam
Bushmaster	Treasure of Manco
Friends	Jenny's Chance
DOA MacGyver	Deep Cover
For Love or Money	Lost Amadeus
Lost Love (parts 1 and 2)	Hearts of Steel
Back from the Dead	Rush to Judgment
Ghost Ship	Passages
Fire and Ice	Tough Boys
GX-1	Humanity
Jack in the Box	The Gun
Widowmaker	Twenty Questions
Hell Week	the Wall
Blow out	Lesson in Evil
Kill Zone	Harry's Will
Early Retirement	MacGyver's Women
Thin Ice	Bitter Harvest
The Odd Triple	The Visitor
Negotiator	Squeeze Play
Spoilers	Jerico Games
Mask of the Wolf	Wasteland
Rock the Cradle	Eye of Osiris
Endangered	High Control
Murder's Sky	There But For the Grace
Secret of the Parker House	Blind Faith
Blood Brothers	Faith Hope and Charity
Outsiders	Strictly Business
On a Wing and a Prayer	Trail of Tears
Collision Course	Hind-Sight
Survivors	Honest Abe
Deadly Dreams	Hood

Obsessed
 Prometheus Syndrome
 Coltons
 Walking Dead
 Good Knight MacGyver (parts 1 and 2)
 Deadly Silents
 Split Decision
 Gunz 'N Boys
 Off the Wall
 Stringer
 Mountain of Youth
 Lost Treasure of Atlantis
 Trail to Doomsday

Factoids: MacGyver

Note: USA Network continues to run *MacGyver*, currently in a daytime slot.

MacGyverisms is a *MacGyver* fanzine available from Jeanne Gold (see under *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues*).

An Internet discussion list for *MacGyver* is available by subscription. E-Mail to:

macgyver-l-request@io.org

In the body of the message write: subscribe macgyver-l <your address>

MacGyver World Wide Web pages are available at:

**<http://falcon.cc.ukans.edu/~mlkel/macgyver>
<http://www.io.org/~chrysp/macgyver/macgyver.html>**



Dr. Sam Beckett Scott Bakula
 Al Calavicci Dean Stockwell
 Gooshi Dennis Wolfberg

Premise:

Project Quantum Leap was designed to take Dr. Sam Beckett into the past. When he entered the imaging chamber ahead of schedule, Sam found himself transported to the past into the body of another man. Now he leaps from time to time,

always into a new person (and sometimes an animal) righting the wrongs of the past. His friend Al, who reaches him as a hologram, is his only link to the present. Gooshi is another member of the team, and Ziggy is the Project's computer.

Episode list (in order of airdate):

Pilot Movie (aka "Genesis")
 Star-Crossed
 The Right Hand of God
 How The Tess Was Won
 Double Identity
 The Color of Truth
 Camikazi Kid
 Play It Again, Seymour
 Honeymoon Express
 Disco Inferno
 The Americanization of Machiko
 What Price Gloria?
 Blind Faith
 Good Morning, Peoria
 Thou Shalt Not ...
 Jimmy
 So Help Me God
 Catch A Falling Star
 A Portrait for Trojan
 Animal Frat
 Another Mother
 All-Americans
 Her Charm
 Freedom
 Good Night, Dear Heart
 Pool Hall Blues
 Leaping In Without a Net
 Maybe Baby
 Sea Bride
 M.I.A.
 The Leap Home
 The Leap Home, Part II
 Leap of Faith
 One Strobe Over the Line
 The Boogiemane
 Miss Deep South
 Black On White On Fire
 The Great Spontini
 Rebel Without a Clue
 A Little Miracle
 Runaway
 8 1/2 Months
 Future Boy
 Private Dancer
 Piano Man
 Southern Comforts
 Glitter Rock

A-Hunting We Will Go
 Last Dance Before An Execution
 Heart of a Champion
 Nuclear Family
 Shock Theater
 The Leap Back
 Play Ball
 Hurricane
 Justice
 Permanent Wave
 Raped
 The Wrong Stuff
 Dreams
 A Single Drop of Rain
 Unchained
 The Play's the Thing
 Running For Honor
 Temptation Eyes
 The Last Gunfighter
 A Song for the Soul
 Ghost Ship
 Roberto!
 It's A Wonderful Leap
 Moments to Live
 The Curse of Ptah-Hotep
 Stand Up
 A Leap For Lisa
 Lee Harvey Oswald
 Leaping of The Shrew
 Nowhere to Run
 Killin' Time
 Star Light, Star Bright
 Deliver Us From Evil
 Trilogy, Part I
 Trilogy, Part II
 Trilogy, Part III
 Promised Land
 A Tale Of Two Sweeties
 Liberation
 Dr. Ruth
 Blood Moon
 Return
 Revenge
 Goodbye Norma Jean
 The Beast Within
 The Leap Between The States
 Memphis Melody
 Mirror Image

Factoids: Quantum Leap

Note: USA Network is still airing *Quantum Leap* in a late-night time slot.

Taken from the list compiled by Mary Anne Espenshade (mae@aplexus.jhuapl.edu); send a SASE for information:

Quantum Quarterly (newsletter) c/o Jim Rondeau, 1853 Fallbrook Ave., San Jose, CA 95130

Jim is also doing a fiction zine: **Snap! Crackle! Leap!**, planned for mid '95; and publishes zines for others: **Chain Reactions**, edited by Miriam Ferziger, all submissions through the Internet and **The Return**, a post-Mirror Image novelette by Barbara Walton, with cover by <=minds-i-view=>.

The Leaper's Journal (letter/opinion zine), 4207 Sherbrook Drive, Jackson, MS 39212

Lucy Green, MacWombat Press, 2500 Jackson-Keller, Apt. 601, San Antonio, TX 78230: **Different Drummer**, digest size zine; **Impossible Dreams**, digest size zine.

Carol Davis, 1251 S. Wellesley Ave. #203, Los Angeles, CA 90025: **A Dozen Points in Time** #1-5; **A Fork in the Road**, sequel to "Mirror Image." **Heartstories** #1-3, romantic QL stories - age statement required.

Cathy Madden, Unpretentious Press, 14126 Sherman Way #518, Van Nuys, CA 91405: **Even Heroes Are Human**, novel sequel to the trilogy

H. Ann Walton, Queen's Press, 4003 Old Hearne Rd., Bryan, TX 77803-0635: **Faces of Clay** (cross universe novel - *QL/Crime Story*/with a little *Twin Peaks* thrown in). **As Time Goes By** #1-3 ("That's 'by' Sam." "But, Al, time is always saying 'bye' to me").

Rebecca Smathers, 7307 Haskell Avenue #2, Van Nuys, CA 91406: **Fate's Wide Wheel** #1, #2 **Burning Memories**, #3.

Mark R. Dalpes, 11210 W. 60th Ave., Arvada, CO 80004: **Friends in Time** - crossover zine; **Mark's Leaps** - the author becomes a leaper.

Mystery Frank (Mysti), 4103 8th St., Baltimore, MD 21225-2136: **Green Eggs and Ham** #1-7.

Jennifer Adams Kelley, 748 Dodge Ave., Evanston, IL 60202: **I've Leaped & I Can't Get Up; I've Leaped & I Can't Get Up Again**; #3 - **I've Leaped and I Still Can't Get Up**, is planned.

Joyce Muskat, 3203 Summertime Lane, Culver City, CA 90230: **The Janus Factor**, cross universe zine novel with *The Real Ghostbusters*, by Cindy Rancourt.

Lorraine Bartlett, 435 McCall Rd., Rochester, NY 14616-5248: **Leaping to Conclusions**.

Michael Ruff - Ruff and Ready Press, 1776 Scottsville-Mumford Rd., Scottsville, NY 14546: **Look Before You Leap** #1-5, order from Bill Hupe.

Julie Barrett, Threadneedle Press, 2624 E. Park Blvd., Plano, TX 75074 (E-Mail - barrett@iadfw.net): **A Matter of Time** #1-5; **Quantum Chain**, #1 and #2 (digest-size "chain" stories); **The Hologram** - a zine review and ad quarterly starting with issue #5. 1-4 were published by the Project Quantum Leap club and are available from Bill Hupe.

Lorraine Anderson, P.O. Box 463 (111 Barnard Ave.), Three Rivers, MI 49093: **More Misadventures**; **More Misadventures Lite**, available from Bill Hupe.

Bill Hupe + Peg Kennedy, Footrot Flats, 916 Lamb Rd., Mason, MI 48854-9554: **Quantum Mechanics** #1-3, edited by Peg Kennedy; **Oh Boy!** #1-6 (Editors: Sandy Hall and Sharon Wisdom, mail to: Sandy Hall, 4819B Meadow Lark Lane, Columbia, MO 65201); **Best of Two Worlds**, novel sequel to "Second Circle" in **Oh Boy** #1; **Beyond the Mirror** post MI novel by Gail J. Christison; **Continuum** (five stories by Taerie Bryant); **Leap Into Knight** - also by Sandy, a *QL/Forever Knight* story.

Kate Nuernberg, 441 Windy Ridge Rd., Front Royal, VA 22630: **Play It Again** #1-6.



Private detective Marty Hopkirk was murdered while investigating a case, leaving behind his partner Jeff Randall and his widow Jean.

Following the funeral, Jeff visited Marty's grave, and Marty appeared before him. Marty failed to return to his grave by dawn, violating an ancient rhyme: "Before the sun shall rise on you, each ghost unto his grave must go. Cursed the ghost who dares to stay and face the awful light of day." By remaining out of his grave after sunrise, Marty

effectively cursed himself to walk the earth for 100 years. Only Jeff (and isolated psychics) could see him, and together, they reformed their detective partnership in an effort to catch Marty's murderer. When that's done, Jeff was stuck with Marty, and Marty with Jeff.

THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS

There are no specific references to episodes of the series cited in the stories in this issue.

Three college professors (Spengler, Stantz and Venkman) specializing in the paranormal were fired from their jobs at Columbia University. In an effort to make it in the "real world" they opened business as the Ghostbusters, making use of the various inventions and theories of Spengler and Stantz. With their secretary Janine Melnitz and assistant Winston Zeddemore, the trio found themselves facing the reality of ghosts, goblins, and ghouls in the Big Apple.

Factoids - Real Ghostbusters

Highly recommended *Real Ghostbusters* fanzines include the following; please note that these are zines that your editor has read and can recommend; there are a lot of other *RGB* zines out there that I haven't gotten to yet:

Ecto-1 through **Ecto-4** are available from Sheila Paulson, 2408 Beaver, Des Moines, IA 50310-3904. Sheila also has reprint rights to **Adventures in Slime and Time**, which was edited by the late Kathy Hintze. Also available by Sheila are the novels **Exile**, **Spells**, **Demon Blues** and **The Tasks of the Chosen** from Bill Hupe, Footrot Flats, 916 Lamb Road, Mason, MI 48854.

RGB novels **Nearly Fatal Attraction**, **Breathless Anticipation**, **Crimea River** and **Going Native** are available from Pam Spurlock, 256 Vester, Ferndale, MI 48220. SASE for information.

PKE Readings, one of the best *Real Ghostbusters* fanzines in print, is available from B.J. Tandarich, 843 Columbian, Oak Park, IL 60302. SASE for information.

Marginal Error (multi-media novel), **Root of All Evil**, **The Times They Are A'Changin'** (crossover novel with *Back to the Future*), and **Shadowstar** (multi-media zine, several issues contain excellent *RGB* fiction) are available from Mary Jean Holmes,

10534 W. Cortez Circle #7, Franklin, WI 53132.
SASE for information.

Revenants and Roses is available from Sharon Dickerson, 5836 East Lovers Lane, Apt. 3-132, Dallas, TX 75206-4364.

And **Trap Open!** is available from your humble editor until the current stock is sold out.

Also available is the *Real Ghostbusters* amateur press association (APA), **APARitions**. For information, send a SASE to A. 'Nea Dodson, 3741 Evans Trail Way, Beltsville, MD 20705.

We Got One! (cover by yours truly) is available from Kathy Agel, 9-11 Ayres Court, Bayonne, NJ 07002-3510. **We Got Two!** is due out sometime. SASE for information.

ROBIN OF SHERWOOD

Robin of Loxley (first season) . . . Michael Praed
Robert of Huntingdon (second season) . . . Connery
Sheriff of Nottingham Nickolas Grace
Marian of Leaford Judi Trott
Will Scarlet (ne Scathlock) Ray Winstone
John Little of Hathersage Clive Mantle
Much the Miller's Son Peter Lewellyn-Williams
Nasir the Saracen Mark Ryan
Friar Tuck Phil Rose
Sir Guy of Gisbourne Robert Addie

Episode list (in order of airdate):

Robin Hood and the Sorcerer
The Witch Of Elsdon
Seven Poor Knights From Acre
Alan a Dale
The King's Fool (a.k.a. Richard the Lionhearted)
The Prophecy
The Children Of Israel
Lord Of The Trees
The Enchantment
The Swords Of Wayland
The Greatest Enemy

Herne's Son

The Power Of Albion
The Inheritance
The Cross Of St. Ciricus
Cromm Cruac
The Betrayal
Adam Bell
The Pretenders
Rutterkin
The Sheriff Of Nottingham
Time Of The Wolf

Factoids – Robin of Sherwood

For *Robin of Sherwood* fan fiction, try **Albion**, **Albion Apocryphal**, and **Albion Special**, all published by Helen Avry and Laura Blunk. For more information, send a SASE to Helen L. Avry, 490 East Twinsburg Road, Northfield, OH 44067.

The Hooded Man is a novel by Jenni Hennig (Greenwoode Press, c/o. Bill Hupe and Peg Kennedy, Footrot Flats, 916 Lamb Road, Mason, MI 48854). Also **Legend**, **Legends of the Greenwood**, **Tree of Life**, **Sherwood Legacy**, **Forbidden Forest**, **Silver Arrow 5**, **In the Shadow of the Wheel**, Vol. 1 & 2, **Robin of Loxley: The Missing Years**, **Robin of Sherwood: The Early Years**.

Spirit of Sherwood is an authorized *Robin of Sherwood* Appreciation Society. For more information, send a SASE to Spirit of Sherwood, 1276 West Marshall, Ferndale, MI 48220. The club also sponsors a convention (Weekend in Sherwood) and the Major Oak Awards, a *Robin of Sherwood* fannish achievement award (and your editor won one in 1993 for poetry!). Information is also available by E-Mail from ChrisRHood@aol.com.

Lady Wolfshead: SASE to Mick Spencer, 117 Kim Acres Drive, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

Guardian of the Arrow: SASE to Amy Hull, 113 Adeline Dr., Apt. 4, Belleville, IL 62221.

Loxley: SASE to: Kate Raymond, P.O. Box 516, Midlothian, IL 60445 (E-Mail to geiger@sxu.edu).

Turn of the Wheel: SASE to: MaryAnn McKinnon, 254 Blunk Ave., Plymouth, MI 48170.

Greenwood & Beyond Microzine: SASE to Janet Van Meter, 222 West Pacemont, Columbus, OH 43202.

Oaken Heart: SASE to P. L. Heyes, 928 West Thomas St., Rome, NY 13440-2540.

Silver Arrow: SASE or IRC to Julie Phipps, 47 Cotswold Ave., Duston, Northampton, NN5 6DP, ENGLAND.

Sacred Oak: SASE to Lisa Morrissey, 3503 4th St., Des Moines, IA 50313 (E-Mail LisaRosa@aol.com).

Outlaw Tales: SASE to Cindy Barwin and Kitty Gamarra, 8500 Ashton Ave., Inver Grove Hts., MN 55075 (E-Mail CJBarwin@aol.com).

A World Wide Web page for *Robin of Sherwood* is available at:

<http://www.users.interport.net/~logomenc/ros.html>



Agents of a mysterious power, Sapphire and Steel are "elements" set to battle the intrusion of Time

beyond its ordered boundaries. Time invades the present through many guises, including the occult; these "irregularities" strain the fabric of reality. Sapphire and Steel each have peculiar abilities: Sapphire can halt time for brief periods, or play it back in a loop; Steel can lower his body temperature to the freezing point of the steel alloy from which he takes his name. Teamed with other "elements" like Silver, Lead and Jet, they fight an unending battle against the depredations of Time and its agents.

Factoids: Sapphire and Steel

The Manifest #2 contained two *Sapphire & Steel* crossover stories (with *Shadow Chasers*), and will hopefully expand on this in issue #5.

Bill Hupe carries two zines that feature *Sapphire and Steel*; SASE to Bill for information.



Recurring Characters, Season One:

Nathan Hale Bridger, Captain . . . Roy Scheider
 Commander Jonathan Devin Ford, XO
 Don Franklin
 Dr. Kristin Westphalen, Chief Scientist
 Stephanie Beacham
 Lt. Commander Katherine Hitchcock, Ship's
 Engineer
 Stacy Haiduk
 Chief Manilow Crocker, Security
 Royce D. Applegate
 Lt. Benjamin Krieg, Supply and Morale
 John D'Aquino
 Lt. j.g. Tim O'Neill, Communications Ted Raimi
 Chief Miguel Ortiz, WSKRS . . . Marco Sanchez
 Lucas Wolenczak, Civilian . . . Jonathan Brandis
 Chief William Shan, Helm . . . Dustin Nguyen
 Dr. Josh Levin, Scientific Contingent
 Timothy Omundson
 Weapons Officer Phillips Mark Fauser
 Mr. Obatu, Helm Christopher M. Brown
 Professor Danielson, Hologram
 W. Morgan Sheppard
 Admiral William Noyce, Secretary General UEO
 Richard Herd
 Commander Scott Kellar, Astronaut Kent McCord
 Carol Bridger, Hologram Brenda King
 Dr. Raleigh Young Roscoe Lee Browne
 Dr. Malcolm Lansdowne Robert Engels
 Juliana Sarah Koskoff

Recurring Characters, Season Two:

Nathan Hale Bridger, Captain . . . Roy Scheider
 Commander Jonathan Devin Ford, XO
 Don Franklin
 Lt. j.g. Tim O'Neill, Communications Ted Raimi
 Chief Miguel Ortiz, WSKRS . . . Marco Sanchez
 Lucas Wolenczak, Civilian . . . Jonathan Brandis
 Seaman Anthony Piccolo, Experimental
 Michael DeLuise
 Dagwood, GELF Peter DeLuise
 Dr. Wendy Smith, Ship's Medical Officer
 Rosalind Allen
 Lt. James Brody Edward Kerr

Ensign Lonnie Ellen Henderson . . . Kathy Evison
 General Francis Gideon Thomas, UEO
 Jesse Doran
 Commander Scott Kellar, Astronaut Kent McCord
 Carol Bridger, Hologram Brenda King

and of course, Ensign Darwin as himself.

Premise:

"The 21st Century ... Mankind has colonized the last unexplored region on Earth — the Ocean. As Captain of the *seaQuest* and its crew, we are its guardians; for beneath the surface lies the future."

Set in the year 2018, the world has changed to one governed by confederations and mega-companies, and its seas are an open battleground. The United Earth Oceans organization (UEO) was formed to reunite man's last frontier, and the *seaQuest* was commissioned to police the oceans. Created by Nathan Bridger, the *seaQuest* was an innovative concept, an ocean-going vessel equally designed for combat as for scientific research. When Bridger was conned out of retirement, he took over command of the *seaQuest*, guiding both its military mission, the protection of the ocean-based communities, and its scientific mission, the exploration of the ocean and its wonders. The original boat was destroyed at the end of the first season, and a modified design was used during the second tour of duty, with a partially new crew and a modified objective. At the end of the second season, the *seaQuest* had been transported to another planet, where it was engaged in a war to save a race, and possibly save the Earth as well.

In the third season, the *seaQuest* reappeared after a 10-year absence on another planet. Several of the crew had been killed, and Captain Nathan Bridger discovered that his son Robert, whom he had believed killed in battle years earlier, still lived. Bridger resigned from the *seaQuest* to raise his grandson, and Captain Oliver Hudson took over command, turning *seaQuest* into a military ship.

Episode list (in order of airdate):

To Be or Not To Be
 The Devil's Window
 Treasures of the Mind
 Games
 Treasure of the Tonga Trench
 Brothers and Sisters
 Give Me Liberte

Knight of Shadows
 Bad Water
 The Regulator
 seaWest
 Photon Bullet
 Better Than Martians
 Nothing But the Truth
 Greed For a Pirate's Dream
 Whale Song
 The Stinger
 Hide and Seek
 The Last Lap at Luxury
 Abalon
 Such Great Patience
 The Good Death
 Higher Power

The Daggers
 Fear That Follows
 Sympathy For the Deep
 Vapors
 Playtime
 The Sincerest Form of Flattery
 By Any Other Name
 When We Dead Awaken
 Special Delivery
 Dead End
 Meltdown
 Lostland
 And Everything Nice
 Dream Weaver
 Alone
 Watergate
 Something in the Air
 Dagger Redux
 The Siamese Dream
 Splashdown
 Blindsided

Factoids: *seaQuest* DSV

Bridger's Folly is a *seaQuest* DSV zine featuring first season stories. SASE to Deb Walsh for more information; a second issue is planned.

Darwin's Log #1 is scheduled for release in fall 1995, with a second issue to follow. SASE to Mary Wardell (see *Shadow Chasers*) for more information.

Sax & Violins #1 features *seaQuest* and other multi-media fiction and art by Barbara Caldwell. SASE for more information to Barbara J. Caldwell, 333 West Roger Rd. #4, Tuscon, AZ 85705.

capeQuest is the largest *seaQuest* DSV fan club in the United States, and features an excellent newsletter, plus updates online. For information, send a SASE to capeQuest, P.O. Box 665, New Cape Quest — Oviedo, FL 32765-0665, Attn: Jennifer Liu-Grushka. A convention is planned for early 1996, and the club is putting together a club fanzine (**Crash Dive!**). Information can also be requested online with E-Mail to DSV4000@gate.com.

Internet board discussion on *seaQuest* can be found at:

alt.tv.seaquest
rec.arts.sf.tv

An Internet discussion list for *seaQuest* is available by subscription. E-Mail to:

seaQuest-request@acca.nmsu.edu

Set subject to: Subscribe!

seaQuest World Wide Web pages are available at:

<http://www.mca.com/tv/seaquest>
<http://www.nbc.com/entertainment/shows/seaquest/index.html>

Ftp site for *seaQuest*:

<http://www.hyperion.com:80/ftp/pub/TV/seaQuest>



There are no specific references to episodes of the series cited in the story in this issue.

Physical anthropologist Dr. Jonathan MacKensie was railroaded into investigating incidents of the paranormal by his department chair, Dr. Julianna Moorhouse. On his first case, he met tabloid reporter Edgar Benedek. Well-versed in the more sensational aspects of the paranormal, Benedek insinuated himself into this and other investigations, bringing in his own special brand of "specialists" to crack the case.

In the *Shadow Chasers* pilot, Jonathan MacKensie was sent to investigate evidence of hauntings in California. A firm non-believer, he was thrilled to meet Edgar Benedek while skulking around the graveyard where the supposed ghost's body is

buried. Fully prepared to turn the investigation over to Benedek so he can get on with his "more important work" of anthropology, MacKensie was shot down in flames by Moorhouse, who was more than familiar with Benedek's brand of tabloid journalism.

It didn't take long for Jonathan to tire of Benedek's peccadillos, and when he asked Benedek just how he got into life on the weird side, Benedek explained that he was once engaged to be married, and his fiancée had gone on a trip. On the day of her return, he had become convinced that her plane would crash, and had attempted to reach her before she left for the airport. Then, while waiting at the airport, he had known, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the person he was waiting for would never arrive. When Jonathan asked if this touching story is true, Benedek replied that it works great on talk shows, leaving MacKensie to wonder at the truth of it.

Factoids: Shadow Chasers

For *Shadow Chasers* fiction, check out **Shadow Chasers Express**, **Prime Time**, **Prime Time Extra** (reprints of classic out-of-print *Shadow Chasers* fiction) and **Crazy Quilt**, all published by Mary F. Wardell. She also has Mary Bloemker's *Shadow Chasers* epic, **Maelstrom** available. SASE to her at 2104 SE 28th Place, Portland, OR 97214.

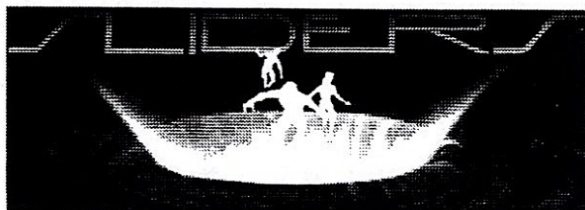
Shadow Play is the sequel zine to **Seeing Double**, and features both *Shadow Chasers* and *Seeing Things*. SASE to Patrice Heyes, 928 West Thomas Street, Rome, NY 13440-2540.

She-Wolf of London

There are no specific references to episodes of the series cited in the story in this issue.

When American graduate student Randi Wallace transferred from Los Angeles to London to study under her idol, Doctor Ian Matheson, research for her masters thesis took her to the moors, where she was attacked by a werewolf. On the next full moon, she found herself transforming into a werewolf herself. When she and Matheson attempted to track down the werewolf who infected her, he was killed, but the "curse" was not broken. Matheson, a firm believer in the non-existence of a true occult, found himself enmeshed in a world of the supernatural as he and Randi attempted to find a cure. When the University

phased out Ian's department, and a friend of Randi's in Los Angeles was killed by trolls, Randi and Ian relocated to California. There Ian hosted a paranormal talk show on KBLA, *How Strange*, while he and Randi continued their search for a cure to Randi's monthly curse.



The *Sliders* discussion list is available by subscription. Send E-Mail to:

Majordomo@stargame.org

subscribe sliders

The *Sliders* fiction list is available by subscription. Send E-Mail to:

listserv@NETCOM.COM

subscribe sliders-creative

Other sources are the alt.tv.sliders.creative newsgroup and the *Sliders* Creative archives available at:

WWW:

<http://eewww.eng.ohio-state.edu/~juodvalk/sliders/>

FTP:

<ftp://eeftp.eng.ohio-state.edu/pub/archive/sliders/>

THE TOMORROW PEOPLE

There are no specific references to episodes of the series cited in the story in this issue.

As *homo sapiens* displaced Cro-Magnon, *homo nova*— The Tomorrow People — was the next step in human evolution. When the psi-damping devices of the alien Kaaltaarn ran down in the 1970s, the evolutionary leap to full psi-powers began with the "breakout," or surfacing of psychic powers, of John, the first Tomorrow Person born on Earth. A brilliant young scientist, he created

the supercomputer TIM (meaning of acronym unknown) with the help of the Galactic Trig, the galaxy-spanning government of the psi-races beyond the Earth. "Breaking out" was frequently a violent process, often placing the potential Tomorrow Person at risk for their sanity, if not their life. As a result, the Tomorrow People remained on constant alert for the signs of another breakout, ready to mobilize immediately to save the life of one of their own. The Tomorrow People maintained a secret headquarters under the streets of London, known only to a few "saps" or *homo sapiens*. The psychic powers of the Tomorrow People included telepathy, telekinesis, teleportation ("jaunting"), and on rare occasions, the ability to transfer their life force into another. All too often, the psychic powers of the Tomorrow People were called into play to save their homeworld, against threats both from without and within.

A *Tomorrow People* World Wide Web page is available at:

<http://www.cs.mcgill.ca/~timelord>



Vanishing Son I, II, III, and IV appeared as movies, part of the Action Pack series.

Jian Wa Russell Wong
Wago Chi Muoi Lo

Premise:

"Running from oppression, yearning for freedom, he came to America. But when he is falsely accused of murder, he must run again, searching for the truth — as both the hunter ... and the hunted."

Episode list (in order by airdate):

Dance of the Dust
Holy Ghosts
Birds of Paradise
Single Flame
Sweet Sixteen
Miracle Under 34th Street

Runaway Hearts
 Lock and Load, Babe
 Two Guys with Guns
 Win, Place or Dead
 Jersey Girl
 Long Ago and Far Away
 Land of the Free

Factoids: Vanishing Son

An Internet discussion board on *Vanishing Son* is available at:

alt.tv.vanishing.son



Factoids: VR.5

An Internet discussion board for VR.5 is available:

alt.tv.vr5

An Internet discussion list for VR.5 is available by subscription. E-Mail to:

listserv@server.microserve.net
subscribe vr5 <your name here>

A Save VR.5! list is available. E-Mail to:

listserv@server.microserve.net
subscribe vrstorm <e-mail address>

A VR.5 fiction list is available by subscription. E-Mail to:

listserv@server.microserve.net
subscribe vrfanfic <your name here>

The X Files

Fire, Eve, Beyond the Sea, Young At Heart, Duane Berry/ Ascension, One Breath, Irresistable, Colony

Second Season Episodes (in order by airdate):

Little Green Men
 The Host
 Blood
 Sleepless
 Duane Berry
 Ascension [Part 2 of Duane Berry]
 Shapes
 3
 One Breath
 Firewalker
 Red Museum
 Excelsius Dei
 Aubrey
 Irresistable
 Die Hand Die Verletzt
 Fresh Bones
 Colony [Part 1 of 2]
 End Game [Part 2 of 2]
 Fearful Symmetry
 Dod Kalm
 Humbug
 The Calusari
 F. Emasculata
 Soft Light
 Our Town
 Anasazi

FBI Agent Fox Mulder was considered the best analyst in the FBI's Violent Crimes Section. When his fascination with the paranormal found expression through the FBI's unexplained phenomena files – the "X-Files" – he used his success in the Bureau to pursue his own interests. The X-Files became an obsession to Mulder, and his Section Chief, Scott Blevins, assigned pragmatic young agent Dr. Dana Scully to team with him, bringing a reality check and a skeptical eye to Mulder's work. Instructed to evaluate the value of the work and submit regular field reports, Scully was drawn into Mulder's passion for the paranormal, although she continued to refuse to believe in the validity of it, despite repeated strange and unexplained experiences. Aided by the mysterious government contact, "Deep Throat," Mulder and Scully continued to investigate bizarre

cases, sometimes finding mundane answers, many times not, and frequently their findings were lost in the morass of Bureau bureaucracy, proof of Mulder's belief in a government conspiracy to cover up the truth of what's "out there."

In the pilot for *The X-Files*, Special Agent Dana Scully was assigned by Section Chief Scott Blevins (Violent Crimes) to partner with Fox "Spooky" Mulder, once a rising star in the FBI's firmament, who now devoted his time to unsolved cases known as "the X-files." Scully was a skeptic, and Blevins wanted her to evaluate the validity of the work done by Mulder. She was assigned to produce regular field reports on her work with Mulder.

Scully and Mulder's first case together was a series of unexplained deaths in Oregon, the last of which revealed strange marks and chemical traces in the victim. Together, they flew out to Oregon and initiated an exhumation of one of the other victims. The exhumation was interrupted by the local coroner, returning from vacation; he had performed the previous autopsies, but the autopsy performed by his temporary replacement was the one which identified the anomalies in the body. Mulder suspected that the regular coroner either failed to notice the anomalies, or chose to leave them unreported. When the body was exhumed, it proved to be wildly mutated, and Mulder insisted on a post-mortem performed by Scully, who was a medical doctor with forensic training. Scully found a strange metal device in the nasal cavity of the corpse, which she pocketed.

A conspiracy appeared to exist in the small Oregon town, and the immediate link between the victims was that they were all graduates of the same high school and had been friends. Three survivors of their group remained: one, the son of the police chief, was catatonic in a mental hospital; another was severely emotionally disturbed, also an inmate of the hospital; and the third was the daughter of the coroner. Scully and Mulder began to investigate the group, including the area of the forest where they'd last been together before the breakdowns and deaths began. Getting back to their motel, Scully noticed strange marks on her back, in roughly the same place as the other victims'. She rushed to Mulder's room and asked him to look at the marks; they are mosquito bites.

Unnerved by the experience, Scully remained in Mulder's room, talking. Mulder told her about how he became interested in the X-Files. When he was 12 years old, his sister had been abducted, and hypnotic regression therapy had revealed memories of an alien presence in the room he shared with her. Mulder was obsessed with finding clues to getting his sister back.

While out investigating leads on the case, Mulder and Scully came back to their motel, to find it in flames; all their evidence had been destroyed. Another victim, the young girl in the mental hospital, was killed, apparently hit by a car. They later learn that the corpse Scully studied had also disappeared. The daughter of the coroner showed up, begging for their protection; she was convinced that she would be the next victim. Taking her to a coffee shop, they listened to her story about how the deaths began, but her father interrupted and took her away.

Mulder figured out who was responsible for the deaths, and he and Scully returned to the forest. There, they found the young man from the hospital attempting to drag the coroner's daughter into the forest. Brilliant light filled the forest, as if from an extraterrestrial source. Mulder and the police chief stopped the boy, and he spoke for the first time in several years. Follow-up interrogation revealed that he had been abducted by aliens, and had been instructed to provide test subjects; when the tests failed, the aliens came back to destroy the specimens. He had been bringing his friends back to the aliens for destruction.

Scully and Mulder returned to Washington, and Scully provided her report to Blevins. The only surviving evidence is the metal object she removed from the corpse. She turned it over to Blevins, and he turned it over to the mysterious man known as "The Smoking Man," who placed it in an evidence warehouse in the Pentagon, in a clear plastic box containing similar devices.

In "Eve," two bizarre murders take place 3,000 miles apart, but at precisely the same time. Both victims were "exsanguinated," their blood removed by small puncture wounds in the jugular, the heart's pumping action providing the force to pump the blood out of the bodies. Scully and Mulder took on the case because of the strange similarity to cattle mutilations, but the case took on an even stranger cast when they discovered that the daughters of both victims were virtually

identical. Tina Simmons, the daughter of the Connecticut victim, was abducted from the State child welfare facility, and they feared that the second girl, Cindy Reardon of California, would also be kidnapped. They learned from Cindy's mother that she had been born through in vitro fertilization. Mulder staked out the house, waiting for the kidnapper, while Scully investigated the possibility that both girls were products of the same in vitro fertilization program.

Visiting the Luther Scapes Center for Reproductive Medicine, Scully learned that the two families had indeed both been in the program, and their physician was the same in both cases — a Dr. Sally Kendrick. The Center's head told her that Kendrick had been performing experiments on the fertilized ova in the lab, prior to implantation, and she was fired. Then she disappeared.

In the meantime, Mulder's contact, Deep Throat, provided Mulder with information on a genetic experiments conducted by the United States during the Cold War — the Litchfield Experiments. He provided Mulder and Scully access to the Whiting Institute for the Criminally Insane, where they were conducted to the cell of "Eve 6."

There they learn of the eight original Eves, all identical to Tina and Cindy, and their male counterparts, the Adams. Eve 7 escaped many years ago, and Eve 8 10 years later. Only Eve 6 remained — the Eves were prone to suicide, as well as considerably higher intelligence, physical strength and psychosis. Eve 6 had been in restraints for years because of an attack she had made on a guard.

Cindy Reardon was kidnapped by one of the older Eves, and Mulder and Scully were unable to stop her. They launched a search for the woman and child with local law enforcement officials. In the meantime, Eve 7, or Dr. Sally Kendrick, introduced the two girls to each other. She explained to them that with drug therapy, it was possible to curb the psychosis, which hadn't become evident in the Eves until around age 20. She had hoped that her experiments had eliminated the "Litchfield Flaws," but in fact, the psychosis and homicidal behavior became accelerated — Cindy and Tina, both age 8, had killed their fathers. Kendrick asked them how they knew about each other, and they tell her, "We just knew." Then, Sally Kendrick became ill — Tina and Cindy had poisoned her with foxglove they

had cultivated, placing the distillation in Sally's soda. By the time Mulder and Scully arrived, they had staged an apparent escape by the remaining adult Eve, and claimed that Sally Kendrick had attempted to kill them.

Scully and Mulder took the girls with them to return Cindy to her home, and Tina to the Connecticut child welfare department. On the way, one of the girls asked to go to the bathroom, and Mulder pulled into a truck stop. While Scully and Mulder were in the bathrooms, one of the girls poured foxglove into their sodas. Mulder accidentally left his keys on the table in the truck stop, and had to return to retrieve them; when he did, he noticed a greenish fluid on the table. Tasting it, he realized that it was the sweet foxglove compound, and that the girls were the murderers, not Sally Kendrick.

He returned to the car and knocked Scully's drink out of her hands, but the girls had run away. They finally caught up with them, and the two eight-year-olds were incarcerated in the Whiting Institute.

An older woman entered the Institute, gave her identification and was passed through to the cell block containing Eve 6, Eve 9 and Eve 10. She was Eve 8, come to break the girls out of the prison. When she asked how they knew to expect her, they told her, "We just knew."

In "Fire," Mulder's old flame from his Oxford days, Phoebe Green, asked him to help her protect a visiting Parliament member from the attentions of a possible serial killer. Several men had been killed in England, each catching fire from mysterious means. Mulder, unnerved by the return of Phoebe into his life, nonetheless agreed to help, although he did not invite Scully's assistance. While Mulder was in Boston with Phoebe, Scully did some digging of her own, and discovered that an English man was issued a visa recently, but that man was supposedly dead, burned years earlier. She flew up to Boston to meet with Mulder, and shortly after she arrived, the hotel floor where the Parliamentarian's children were caught fire. Mulder was terrified of fire, but tried to get to the children, but was overcome by smoke inhalation. The children were "saved" by the groundskeeper-cum-chauffeur, whom they don't yet realize is the serial killer.

With the family feeling safe with the killer, he later began to ignite the house, which he had prepared with a powerful accelerant. Cornered by the FBI agents, the pyromaniac set fire to himself, collapsing on the grounds. The flames did not kill him, and the episode closed with the firebug in a parabolic chamber, where his wounds were rapidly healing. Tests showed that he possessed an unusual genetic makeup capable of incredible regeneration.

In "Beyond the Sea," Scully suffered the death of her beloved father. She insisted that she needed to work, not sit around doing nothing, and became involved in a serial murder case with Mulder. Two teenagers had been kidnapped, and following the existing pattern, those teenagers would be tortured and murdered by a specific date. A felon whom Mulder had put away with his psychological profile, Luther Lee Boggs, claimed to be able to see what the killer was doing, and Mulder and Scully journeyed to the prison where Boggs was being held on death row. Boggs gave them clues as to the killer's whereabouts and actions, and they were able to recover one of the victims, although Mulder was seriously wounded in the affray.

Scully stepped in to take over interrogation with Boggs, and Boggs led her to believe that not only could he see the killer, he could also allow her to speak with the spirit of her departed father. In exchange for a stay of execution, Boggs would let Scully hear what her father had to say. Scully wrestled with her conscience, and attempted to get Boggs a stay of execution, but it was refused. She and Mulder tracked down the killer, and Scully's life was saved by Boggs' warning. Since she had tried to help him, Boggs told her he'd let her hear her father's words, but she elected not to, claiming she already knew what her father wanted to say to her.

In "Young at Heart," Mulder was forced to come to terms with the first major failure of his FBI career. Shortly after graduating the FBI Academy, Mulder had developed the psychological profile that led to the capture of serial killer John Barnett. But when the team moved in to capture Barnett, Mulder hesitated in using his weapon, and one of his fellow agents was killed by Barnett. Years later, Barnett supposedly died in prison, but in fact had been part of a bizarre experiment to meld amphibian DNA with human, effectively creating a creature that could regenerate. Barnett stalked

Mulder and his close associates, finally aiming for Scully. Forewarned, Scully was wearing a bullet-proof vest when Barnett attacked, but she was still bruised from the impact of Barnett's bullets. Barnett was fatally injured, but the shadow government fought to keep him alive, since he was the only person who knew how the DNA grafting had been done. Barnett died, this time for real.

In "E.B.E." (Extraterrestrial Biological Entity), Mulder and Scully attempted to track down the occupant of a downed craft, supposedly of extraterrestrial origin. At one point, they turned to the renegade government watchdog group, The Lone Gunmen. Named after the "lone gunman" theory of the Kennedy assassination, the group of conspirators had contacts and sources of information the FBI couldn't tap.

In "The Erhlenmeyer Flask," Mulder's secret government source, Deep Throat, provided Mulder with clues leading to a bizarre government experiment — humans have been injected with alien cells. Run by a covert agency within the government, the experiment was being shut down, and all evidence — including the injected humans — was being destroyed. When Mulder, who had been captured by the covert organization, was exchanged for evidence found by Scully, Deep Throat was mortally wounded. Shortly after, the X-Files were closed, and Scully and Mulder expected reassignment.

The second season began with an eight-story arc that included the "Duane Berry" two-parter, in which Dana Scully was abducted. Berry had been an FBI agent, haunted by memories of his own abduction. Mulder intervened in a hostage situation created by Berry, and believed that Berry was telling the truth. Scully was convinced the man was psychopathic. Berry kidnapped Scully and took her to the place where the aliens were coming to get her, and offered her up in his place. Mulder arrived at the site shortly after Scully disappeared. Berry was killed by renegade Agent Krycek during interrogation, and no evidence of Scully's whereabouts were available.

Several episodes later, in "One Breath," Scully was discovered, near death. Only the determination of those who loved her — including Fox Mulder — brought her back from the brink. Memories of experimentation, possibly at the hands of aliens, possibly at the hands of the human military, haunted her.

In the episode "Irresistible," a necrophiliac in Minnesota waged a quiet campaign of terror against women in the area. He started with corpses, and worked his way into living women he then killed for pleasure. Victims were mutilated after death. Mulder and Scully were brought in to investigate. Scully had great difficulty in dealing with the nature of the crimes, and sought psychiatric counseling from the Bureau office in Minnesota. During the course of the investigation, Scully was captured by the madman. As he prepared to kill her, his image was overlaid by that of an alien. Scully was working free of her bonds when Mulder and other FBI agents broke in and captured the murderer.

In the two-parter "Colony" and "End Game," Mulder appeared to achieved his greatest wish — the return of his sister, Samantha. A pattern of killings along the eastern seaboard, all of men looking identical, led Mulder and Scully into a bizarre investigation. When Mulder was called home, Scully continued to follow leads, eventually finding the remaining men — all of whom were clones — and taking them into protective custody. Mulder, meanwhile, arrived home to find someone waiting for him — a woman claiming to be his long-lost sister. She told him that the people who had raised her after her return were being hunted by a killer, and that he had already seen her foster father's brothers. Mulder attempted to reach Scully, but Scully was on the run from the killer, and they missed one another. A man who claimed to be Mulder arrived at the motel where Scully was hiding, just as Mulder called her. Scully was taken captive by the killer, who could change his appearance to look like anyone.

"Samantha" told Mulder that she could help him get Scully back, since she knew how to kill the killer. Skinner assisted Mulder, lining up a crack team of sharpshooters to take out the killer once they had Scully back. Scully was exchanged for Samantha, and the killer eluded pursuit, leaping into the river below the bridge where the exchange took place. After finding his sister, Mulder lost her again.

Samantha's body was recovered, but it dissolved, like the bodies of the identical men. Mulder tracked down the address of a clinic in Samantha's purse, discovering several other Samanthas, all of whom were clones. The woman he'd believed to be his sister was not, although the clones claimed they knew where she was. The killer attacked the

clinic, killing the women, and only Mulder was saved by rescue personnel.

Mulder's new contact, Mr. X, gave him the coordinates of a ship in the Arctic where the killer was headed. Mulder followed, finally coming face to face with the killer. When he injured the killer, his blood became infected with an agent similar to that introduced in "Erlenmeyer Flask," and the killer dumped him out onto the ice flow. Mulder was recovered some hours later and airlifted to a medical facility.

In the meantime, Skinner helped Scully find out where Mulder had gone, engaging in a spectacular fist fight with Mr. X. Scully arrived at the medical facility shortly after Mulder was brought in, and forced the medical personnel there not to raise Mulder's temperature until the infected blood could be cured of the alien agent. Mulder eventually recovered.

Factoids — The X-Files

Production Addresses:

Jonathan Littman
Director of Current Programming
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Beverly Hills, CA 90123

Chris Carter
Executive Producer
"The X-Files"
20th Century Fox
10201 W. Pico Blvd., Building 75
Los Angeles, CA 90064

The Fox Network also has an Internet address to which you can E-mail your comment on the series. Charles Kennedy, Vice President of Programming Research, is the contact. The address is: **Foxnet@delphi.com**. If you send E-mail, indicate "X Files" in the subject line.

An online *X-Files* fan club exists on America Online. To join, send E-Mail to FoxxMulder (FoxxMulder@aol.com on Internet).

For Internet users, there are several active *X-Files* groups (including **rec.arts.tv.x-files** and **alt.tv.x-files**, as well as the fiction board, **alt.tv.x-files.creative**), and an *X-Files* FAQ ("Frequently-Asked Questions") is compiled by and available

from "Special Agent" Pat Gonzales via E-Mail at gonza006@maroon.tc.umn.edu. Also available on the net are episode guides, the FAQ to the creative list, and Mulderisms and Scullyisms.

The fan-run *X-Files* Fan Club was formed with the sanction of 20th Century Fox and Ten Thirteen Productions in March 1994. A year's subscription is \$20 (\$30 Canadian). The fan club, a nonprofit organization, produces a newsletter/magazine containing news, interviews, pictures, episode guides, bibliographic information, more information on topics brought up in the show, and other items. Although net-fandom will be well represented (one section of the newsletter will be called "The Buzz from the Net"), the newsletter is targeted at general fandom. Submissions are welcome! Electronic newsletter submissions may be sent to x-files@info.rutgers.edu. A postscript version of the fan club membership application may be ftp'd from <ftp.rutgers.edu>; the file is <pub/x-files/membership/flier.ps>. For more information, send a SASE to: **X Files Fan Club**, P.O. Box 3138, Nashua, NH 03061-3138 or *X Files Fan Club*, c/o S. Bartle, 4404 Perry St., Vancouver, BC Canada V5N 3X5.

Incident UXP is an *X-Files* fanzine being published by Debbie Roberts of Hangar X Publishing, 2419 N. Tejon St., Colorado Springs, CO 80907. Send a SASE for more information.

OtherWhen Press is planning a crossover fanzine (characters meet characters from other media universes) called **Crossfiles**, which will include crossovers with the *X-Files* universe. Planned publication date is May 95. For information send a SASE to OtherWhen Press, c/o Beth Bowles, 722 Brownstone Rd., Larimer, PA 15647.

The first issue of **Travels with Mulder** is available, with another in the works. SASE to Prime Time Press, c/o Mary F. Wardell, 2104 SE 28th Place, Portland, OR 97214

Betsy Vera is planning an *X-Files* fanzine called **X-treme Possibilities**. For more information or submissions guidelines, send a SASE to: Bentley Press, c/o Betsy Vera, P.O. Box 4356, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, or E-Mail her at betsy.vera@mailgw.uprod.music.umich.edu.

Impossible Dreams is a *Quantum Leap* fanzine, but there is an *X-Files* story in it. For more information, send a SASE to Lucy Green,

MacWombat Press, 2500 Jackson-Keller #601, San Antonio, TX 78230.

Of Dreams and Schemes #9 has a long *X-Files/Highlander* crossover. They are also looking for stories for future issues. For more information, send a SASE to Catherine Schlein, 6755 Union St., Arvada, CO 80004.

Property of the FBI is an *X-Files* fanzine carrying fiction from alt.tv.x-files.creative. For more information, send a SASE to Lucy Green, MacWombat Press, 2500 Jackson-Keller, Apt. 601, San Antonio, TX 78230. Issue #1 is available.

The first issue of **The Skeptic and the Believer**, an *X-Files* fanzine, is available, and issue #2 is looking for submissions. For more information, send a SASE to Kathryn Agel, 9-11 Ayres Court, Bayonne, NJ 07002-3510, or E-Mail Badkarma.1@genie.com or Badkarma1@aol.com. Issue #1 is available, as are *X-Files* zines **Intriguing Possibilities** and **Gulliver**. In addition, Kathy premiered **The Best Lies**, a slash Mulder/Krycek novel by Cody Nelson, in October 1995; SASE for details.

Imagine That is looking for *X-Files* contributions. For submission guidelines or zine information, send a SASE to Brenda M. Cunningham, Box 123, Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, CANADA S0H 0B0 (all zeros — not letters).

Deus X Machina is a planned *X-Files* fanzine from Tara O'Shea. For information, send a SASE to **Deus X Machina**, c/o Tara O'Shea, 611 Lead Ave. SW, Apt. 911, Albuquerque, NM 87102, or E-Mail to johanna@hydra.unm.edu.

To the Fullest X-Tent is available from Empire Books (Jean Lorrach), P.O. Box 625, Murray, KY 42071-0625.

Available Light is an *X-Files* novel by Kathleen Resch, available from Kathleen Resch, P.O. Box 1766, Temple City, CA 91780.

X-Talk (pronounced "Cross-Talk") is an *X-Files* letterzine whose first issue premiered in September 1994. Issue #1 is \$3.00, and a 4-issue subscription will run \$10, checks payable to Marg Baskin. Letters may be typed or on disks (WordPerfect 6.0/5.1/5.0, WordStar 6.0/4.0/3.3, or ASCII, 3.5" or 5.25" high or low density); label disks as they will be returned with your issue.

Address letters, inquiries (include SASE) or suggestions to Anime House Press, c/o Marg Baskin and Heather Bruton, 28 Woolwich St. S., Kitchener, Ontario, CANADA N2K 1R9.

The following information is excerpted from the *X-Files* FAQ, maintained by Pat Gonzales (gonza006@maroon.tc.umn.edu [Internet] or LauraHolt@aol.com [America Online]).

There is an Internet mailing list for *The X-Files*, run by Chael Hall, which discusses the episodes currently being aired in North America. To sign up for the list, send a message to:

listproc@chaos.taylored.com

subscribe X-FILES <your name>

FTP Sites:

The FTP site at **ftp.cs.nmt.edu** is the most complete, with the FAQs, episode guide, music, images, and fan fiction; directory path is /xfiles.

An FTP site is at **ftp.rutgers.edu** (/pub/x-files), storing only the graphic and sound files.

The site **ftp.shore.net**, run by Pete T. Manolakos (ptman@shore.net), carries text files only; directory path is /members/ptman/x-files.

A creative archive has been set up at **eeftp.eng.ohio-state.edu**.

WWW:

The Official *X-Files* Home Page, run by Delphi, the official *X-Files* site, is at **http://www.delphi.com/XFiles/**.

Charles McGrew (mcgrew@klinzhai.rutgers.edu) has established an http server which contains an *X-Files* mosaic page. This page includes the theme music, miscellaneous sound bites, this FAQ, Episode Guide, DT FAQ, pictures of the cast, and links to other FTP areas, among other things. The path is: **http://www.rutgers.edu/x-files.html**.

Samuel Ziegler (ziegler@jhu.edu) keeps the Mulderisms and Scullyisms list. There documents are available by accessing his homepage: **http://server.cs.jhu.edu/~ziegler/xfiles.html**. If you cannot access his homepage please e-mail him for information about his list.

Stephen Banks's (sbanks@printnet.com) home page contains features available to Netscape 1.1 users, but can be accessed by other applications without losing the flavor of the page. He will have a clip of the current week's *X-Files* show in Quicktime format, plus the previous week's clip and a clip of the next week's episode. There is also a page where visitors can tell of their own *X-Files*-like experiences, The Web Files. It can be reached at **http://www.neosoft.com/sbanks/xfiles/xfiles.html**.

X-Files Web pages (US):

<http://www.rutgers.edu/x-files.html>
<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~roland/x-files/x-files.html>
<http://server.cs.jhu.edu/~ziegler/xfiles.html>
<http://www.uml.edu/~ccashman/x-files/x-files.html>
<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~sbwright/xfiles.html>
<http://hamp.hampshire.edu/~clsS95/x-philes.html>
<http://www.cs.nmt.edu/xfiles/>
<http://www.teleport.com/~crawford/x-files/HomePage.html>
<http://www.mindspring.com/~torgo/xfiles.html>
<http://www.best.com/~rherbst/x-files.html>
<http://www.infinet.com/~rkidder/x-files/top.html>
<http://www.magicnet.net/~dpg/x/>
<http://www.clark.net/pub/boscomel/xfiles.html>
<http://www.interpath.net/~cybervox/x.html>
<http://www.timeinc.com/ew/941202/scifi/251scifiXbar.html>
<http://www.interport.net/~darcom/index.html>
<http://www.neosoft.com/sbanks/xfiles/xfiles.html>
<http://www.amaroq.com/x-files>
<http://192.203.249.66/~leejb/scully.html>
<http://www.bchs.uh.edu/~ecantu/xf.html>
<http://duggy.extern.ucsd.edu/~linny>
<http://www.netaxs.com/~hager/x-files.html>
<http://www.wam.umd.edu/~kris>
<http://sloop.ee.fit.edu/users/lpinto/index.html>
<http://www.electropub.com/~rzman/pc2.html>
<http://eewww.eng.ohio-state.edu/~judovalk/x-files>

Creation Entertainment is sponsoring **The Official X-Files Fan Club**. For information contact them at 818 / 409-0960, or send a SASE to them at 411 N. Central Ave., #300, Glendale, CA 91203.

You are receiving this zine because ...

- ☐ You can't work up a decent tear for Beethoven.
- ☐ Silver could do it.
- ☒ Anything beats paperwork.
- ☐ This leap's too strange for you.
- ☐ Grandma Fraser scares the bejesus out of you, too.
- ☐ You hate fresh air.
- ☐ You paid for it.
- ☐ You contributed.
- ☐ There's enough slime in this job without filling Ecto with your used kleenex.
- ☒ You act on your intuition.
- ☐ Stupid is as stupid does, sir.
- ☐ Ah, the stories we could tell ...
- ☐ You have no need of Windows '95 and its pricey accoutrements ...
- ☐ It's not nice to neutronize Dr. Venkman.
- ☐ Puppets have feelings, too.
- ☐ One must be hospitable to one's guests.
- ☐ Never look a gift doughnut in the mouth ...
- ☐ You love the in-flight movie ...
- ☐ A bad penny always turns up.
- ☐ You just can't wait!
- ☒ *Anything* is possible.
- ☒ You've got too strong a hold on reality.
- ☒ Are you sure your brain is all right?
- ☐ You'll have to hand in your charter membership in Pragmatics Anonymous.

